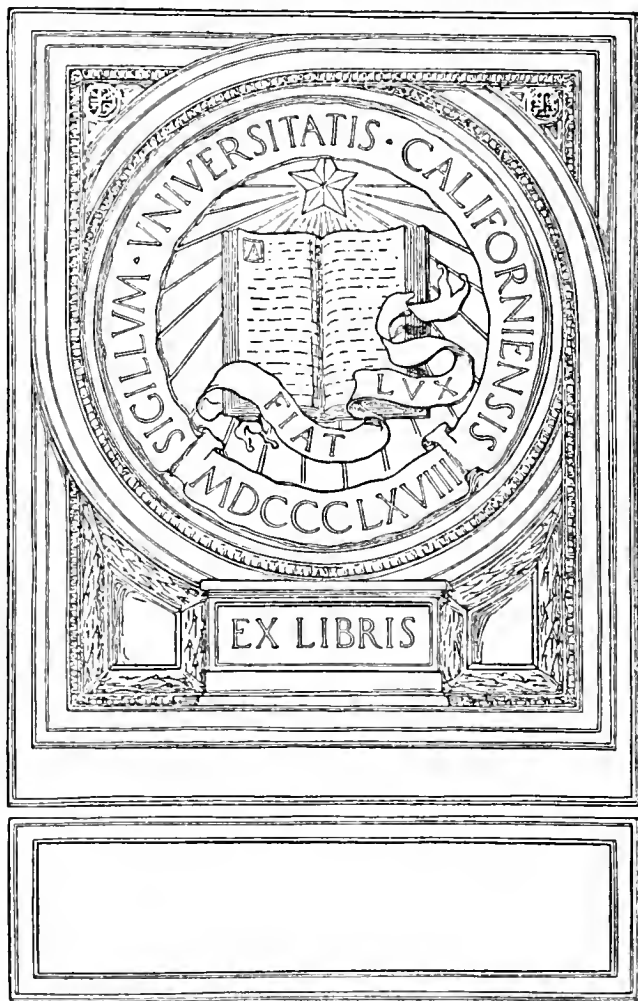


IN MEMORIAM
John Galen Howard
1864-1931



13

EDMOND AND JULES DE GONCOURT



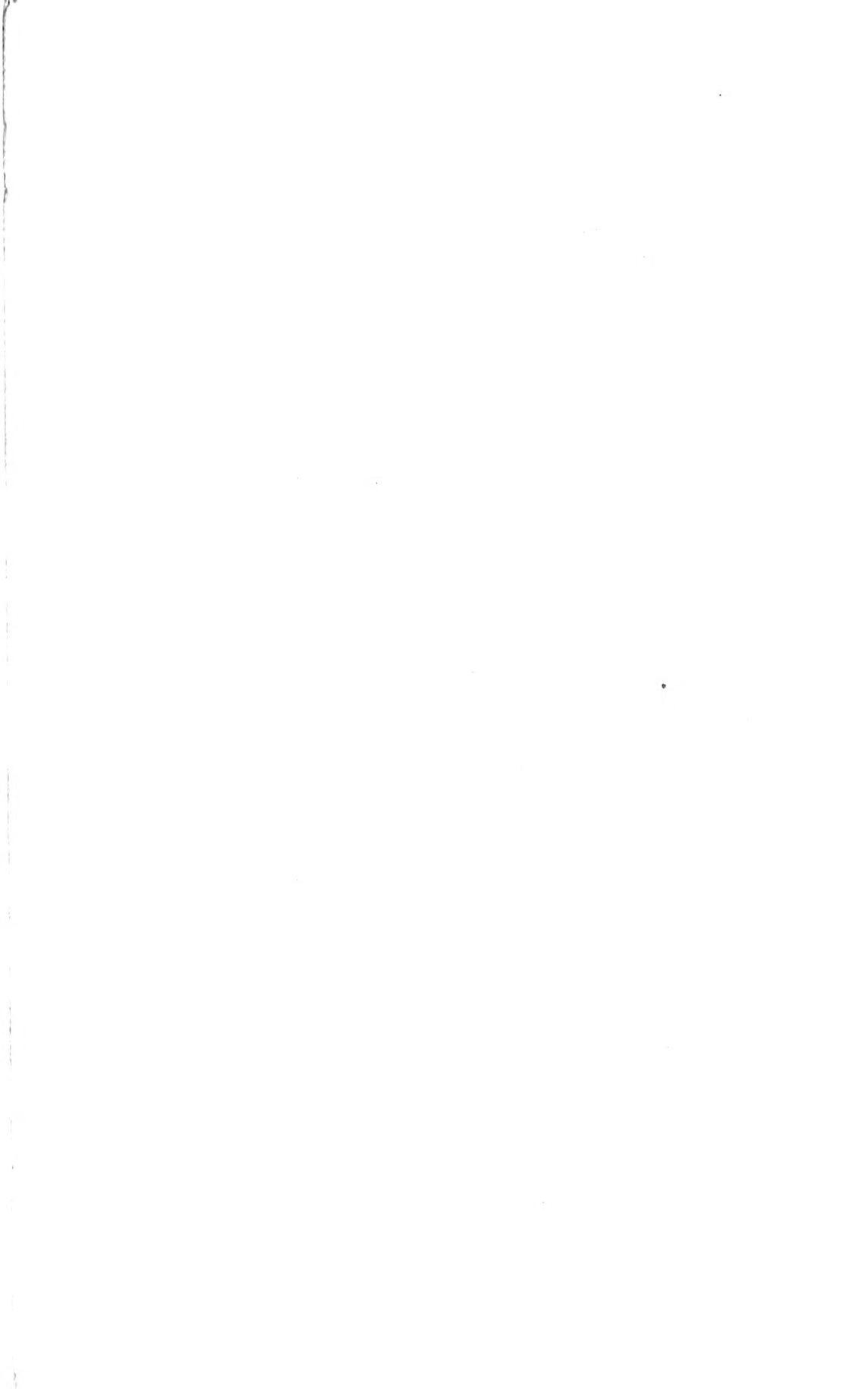
Sister Philomène

With
Seventy Illustrations by
BIELER

GEORGE ROUTLEDGE AND SONS, LIMITED

New York : 9 Lafayette Place

London Glasgow and Manchester



SISTER PHILOMÈNE

E. AND J. DE GONCOURT

TRANSLATED BY LAURA ENSOR

WITH

SEVENTY ILLUSTRATIONS BY BIELER



NEW YORK: 4 LAFAYETTE PLACE
LONDON, GLASGOW AND MANCHESTER

Press of J. J. Little & Co.
Astor Place, New York

GIFT

11 0 d

FJ 11-1
S. E. E.
11/10



M839643



SISTER PHILOMÈNE.

I.

THE ward is vast and lofty, stretching out and disappearing in the distance into endless gloom.

It is night. A couple of stoves throw a red glare from their open grates. At intervals the faint and fading glimmer of night-lights casts a streak of fire across the shining floor. Beneath the flickering and uncertain light the curtains to the right and left faintly

gleam and whiten against the walls ; the beds stand out vaguely—rows of beds with half-shadowy outlines dimly revealed through the darkness. At the further end of the ward something lightens the depths of blackness, something that bears the semblance of a plaster Virgin.

The atmosphere is warm, a damp warmth, heavy with a faint odor, a sickly smell of heated ointment and boiled linseed.

All is hushed. Not a sound nor a movement is heard. Night and silence reign over all. From time to time the stillness is almost imperceptibly broken by a rustle of sheets, a smothered yawn, a half-suppressed groan, a gasp—then the ward again relapses into a dull, mysterious peace.

At a little distance a stout young woman, her hair ruffled with sleep, rouses herself from the big, white-covered arm-chair in which she has been dozing, while her feet rested on the rung of a small chair in front of her, which is faintly lit up by a hand-lamp placed on it, together with a small prayer-book. She passes like a shadow across the lamp-light, goes up to a stove, takes a poker from the hot ashes, stirs and pokes the coals two or three times, then returns

to her arm-chair, replaces her feet on the bar of the chair, and again stretches herself out.

The stirred-up fire gleams more vividly. The night-lights, each in its glass cup, hanging from curved iron brackets, flicker and brighten up. The glimmer from the wicks rises and falls like a regular breath on the luminous and transparent oil, and the shades swaying to the motion of the flame cast on the beams of the ceiling great shadows of ever-moving and agitated circles. Beneath, to the right and left, the light falls softly from the suspended glasses onto the foot of the beds, on the bands of plaited linen at their head, and over the curtains, throwing slanting shadows across bodies huddled up under counterpanes. Shapes and outlines quiver dimly in the uncertain light that surrounds them, while between the beds the high windows, thinly curtained, admit the bluish twilight of a clear, cold winter sky.

The night-lights mark the receding perspective, and the outlines grow dim and blurred as they are gradually lost in darkness. In the intervening spaces, where the light of one ceases and that of the next barely glimmers, great black shadows rise up and meet at the ceiling, throwing a veil of darkness over both

sides of the ward. Further on the eye catches sight of a confused whiteness, and then again all is dark—a dense, opaque darkness in which all is swallowed up.

Out of the thickest of the gloom, at the very end of the ward, a glimmer is seen, a speck of fire appears. A light coming from afar moves forward and increases, like the distant light in a dark landscape toward which the traveller gropes at night. The light draws near; now it is behind the great glass door that closes the ward and separates it from the next one; it lights up the archway, shines through the glass panels, then the door opens, and a candle and two women in white make their appearance.

“Ah! the Mother going her rounds,” murmurs a patient, half awake, closing her eyes and turning away from the light.

The two white-clad women move along slowly and gently. They walk so softly that their footsteps are scarcely heard on the polished tiles. They advance with the candle before them like phantoms in a ray of light.

The one on the side nearest the beds walks with her hands crossed. She is young. Her countenance is sweet and calm and she has a peaceful smile such as dreams silently impress

on a sleeping face. She wears the white veil of a novice. Her woollen dress, which seems yellow when contrasted with the cold whiteness of the sheets and bed covers, is the white robe of the Sisters of Saint Augustine.

By the side of the Sister steps the serving-maid of the community, in a white bodice, white petticoat, and night-cap. She it is who carries the candle, and the light falling on her face lends to her complexion the dull ivory color of some ancient abbess standing out of the dark background of an old portrait.

As the women pass along, the light penetrates through the half-drawn curtains, lights up the beds, and displays for a moment the open mouth, the pinched nostrils, the head thrown back on a pillow, of some slumbering woman, or passes over the thin face of a patient who has dragged her kerchief over her eyes and holds her sheet up to her mouth with her fist tightly closed against her cheek ; or, again, it glances over the raised hoop that supports the counterpane at the foot of a bed, or vaguely indicates by the moulding of the sheets the graceful outline of a slumbering young woman as she lies with her left arm thrown up and encircling her hair, pale as a ghost in the surrounding gloom.

The Sister casts a glance on the sleeping forms; to those awake she nods, smiles a good-night, goes up to their side and gently tucks up the bed-clothes and raises their pillows.

As she passes, an inarticulate sound, a grumbling moan, an angry groan issues from one of the beds. The Sister goes up to it. She raises the old woman in her arms, soothes her by a few soft words uttered in a musical voice, the coaxing voice that mothers and nurses assume to make naughty children obey. Then she turns the patient, bending tenderly over her back, and misshapen form. She moves the poor old thing's emaciated and bony legs aside, and arranges and smooths the sheets. In answer to her caressing voice, to her light, delicate touch, the patient only gives vent to an impatient grumble, an animal-like growl.

"You shall have a poultice," says the Sister.

"I won't have one, I won't," the sick woman tries to scream out in a hollow, confused, and suffocated voice.

The Sister, with the same unvarying gentle words and touch, lays her quietly down, pushes up her cap, and raises by little taps on each side of her head the tumbled and flattened pillow.

Then she resumes her rounds. Here and there the sick people watch her curiously, half raising themselves by means of the wooden bars hanging over their beds, which, long after they have loosed their hold, throw a dancing, flitting shadow over the top of the bed.

She stops before a bed of which all the curtains are tightly drawn together. The folds fall stiff and straight to the ground, the strings of the curtain loops droop loose and idly at the corners. Above the closely veiled couch the written placard no longer hangs on the black metal plate. The Sister goes up to the bed, draws aside a curtain, and disappears for a few seconds behind it. Then making the sign of the cross, she lets the curtain fall once more into its former motionless folds.

The Sister's step becomes slower as she approaches the door of the lying-in ward, from whence issue little cries—cries hushed



for a moment but to break forth stronger and more persistent. The Sister listens to the cheerfully clamorous song from the awakened cradles—a song that to her ears is like the joyous twittering of a young brood. After the mournful silence, after the plaintive sounds of illness, suffering, agony, and death, it seems to her that she hears life, living life, calling aloud in the cries and wails of these new-born infants. Suddenly she is summoned to a bedside by a shriek of pain, followed by sobs, like the sobs of a little child. A light throws a glare within the bed-curtains. A young man stands there, wearing the resident student's skull-cap and a white apron fastened to the button of his coat.

By the light of a taper held on high he examines a weeping and moaning patient. The Sister draws near.

“No, not you,” he says roughly, taking from her hands the bandage she is bringing and passing it with the taper to the nurse standing at the other side of the bed. And he rapidly moves his hands about the patient's body, renewing the dressing.

The Sister does not answer the student, but turns away and disappears at the further end of the Saint-Thérèse ward.



II.

THE Sister's name in religion was Sister Philomène ; on the civil registers it was Marie Gaucher.

Marie Gaucher was the daughter of a tailoress who, married to a locksmith, earned a couple of shillings a day by working for the big shops. Marie was born in an hour of distress, one January morning, by a gay winter's sun ushered into the world between two oaths of the parish midwife, who was

annoyed at having been called away from a patient boarding at her house.

She began life a tiny thing, not weighing the usual weight of a new-born child, without strength for life's struggle, and was fed with the poor milk of a mother whose existence was spent in toiling late and early at her eternal stitching. The child lived all the same, and was four years old when her mother died.

Her father had left them a year before with a fellow-workman who was starting for Africa, and had not been heard of since.

The little child was adopted by an aunt, an elder sister of her mother's, in the service of a widow lady, a Madame de Viry, in the Chaussée d'Antin. She had been living there twenty years, had closed the eyes of Monsieur de Viry, and assisted at the birth of the son of the house, little Henry. She was one of those old-fashioned servants who take root in the family circle. Therefore, when one evening, as she was helping her mistress to undress, she spoke of her niece, Madame de Viry did not even give her time to utter a request, and the very day of the mother's funeral the child was brought home to the Rue Chaussée d'Antin. She looked upon the

apartment, new as it was to her, without any surprise; showed no curiosity at the sight of the furniture, carpets, mahogany cabinets, nor at the clock with its classical bronze figures, and the family portraits in their gilt frames. In a very short time the comforts of this home caused the sickly bud to expand and blossom. Her character, at first unsociable and shy, soon toned down; her prattle and laugh became less constrained, her manners more natural and fearless; the ill-grown, puny child began to thrill with the active brightness of a bird. Madame de Viry, who had accepted her widowhood as an austere duty and had retired from society in order to devote herself more entirely to her son, enjoyed the presence of the child, whose romps and noise and bright blue eyes filled and warmed her saddened and solitary life. Then, again, Madame de Viry had lost a little girl of the same age, and mothers love to caress even the shadow of their child.

The little girl became over-excited by the indulgence shown to her. Tolerated in the drawing-room like a pet lapdog, she soon thought it her proper place and joined in little Henry's games on the footing of equality natural to children. The familiarity with

which the child was treated and her pretty, dainty manners flattered her aunt's vanity, and she felt a secret pride at her being kept out of the kitchen and playing the lady. Marie's little audacities and encroaching ways, her childish conceit that increased by constant association with her superiors, her nascent coquetry that already revelled in the faded ribbons and discarded frocks bestowed on her by Madame de Viry—all this delighted the old woman, who, with the vulgar affection of a woman of the people, loved to surround the little thing with a respectful tenderness, as though the child were of a different class from her own, destined to a higher sphere. Marie was at the age when social barriers seem not to exist, and she was full of illusions; she put on airs with her aunt's friends and the servants of the house, and showed a kind of severe reserve toward the neighboring coal-merchant's children who invited her to play in the street. On one occasion she had been allowed to dine with Henry in honor of his having gained a prize at school, and in consequence she refused the following day to eat with her aunt in the kitchen. On another occasion, not being permitted to join a chil-

dren's party, given every Shrove Tuesday by Madame de Viry, she remained all day long sulkily seated on a chair in the anteroom, hiding and struggling to suppress her tears. She was wounded by a thousand trifles which she failed to understand and yet suffered from ; the slightest neglect, words heedlessly uttered by Madame de Viry, idle observations betraying social differences, all that she instinctively felt placed her in the position of an inferior in the household, bitterly humiliated her. At the end of two years Madame de Viry noticed the evil, saw the irritation of the child, and thought it necessary to change her life and surroundings. Her aunt yielded to Madame de Viry's arguments, though with, a heavy heart, hardly understanding her reasons, and the mistress and maid settled that on the following Monday the little one should enter the orphanage kept by the Sisters of Saint * * *, situated at the top of the Faubourg Saint-Denis.

The day of her departure there was a terrible scene. The child piteously sobbed and clung to the furniture and to Madame de Viry's skirts. She resisted and struggled with all her might even in her aunt's arms, who was at last obliged to carry her bodily off.

Once she had entered the convent gates, all the violence of her despair vanished, and her grief became like that of a grown-up person—silent and frigid. When the Sisters took off her embroidered cap and the silk frock made out of her mother's wedding dress that her aunt had had dyed, and replaced them by a formal little plaited linen cap and a plain green merino frock, she was seized with a fit of trembling, but her eyes remained dry. However, when she went to bed she broke down, and midnight was long past before she fell asleep. The black veil of her closed but sleepless eyelids seemed flecked with visions of the past, fleeting and fugitive as the fiery sparks that start and flit across a burning paper. There passed before her in a transient gleam the corner of the drawing-room in which she used to put her doll, and against a dark background past memories rose up and met her gaze. At one moment the large wine-basket in which her aunt laid her before carrying her up-stairs to bed stood before her, almost within touch, and the sheet of her crib assumed the shape of the dinner napkins on which she slept in that basket; or again she recalled the morning romps, when, returning with her aunt from

marketing, she had jumped like a big dog on Monsieur Henry's bed, putting her little icy-cold hands round his neck, till the sleepy fellow, half angrily, half laughingly, opened one eye, and pushed her off onto the carpet.

The next day, as there was already a little girl called Marie in the convent, and two of the same name might cause confusion, she was informed that in future she would be called Philomène.

This was indeed a desperate blow for the child ; she had been less hurt even by being deprived of the frock she had come in. But now it seemed to her that she was being stripped of all her past life, wrenched away from the happy days she had spent at Madame de Viry's. She hated the name of Philomène, which was for her the convent baptism, the beginning of a life she loathed and dreaded ; and for a long time she refused to answer to her new name.

At first the Sisters petted and strove to amuse her, but she opposed a sullen resistance, a stolid passivity and dull despair to all their coaxing and kindly attentions. The high, bare walls of the quiet house, full of peace, but also full of silence, seemed but dead to her, and here in the midst of the

Sisters, who appeared to her stern and terrible even in their gentleness, she drew morbidly within herself. The atmosphere she breathed fell cold and chill upon her heart, and she gathered to herself all her tender feelings, as though to cheer and warm herself. She thought of her aunt's kisses, which were not like the kisses of the Sisters, in which she instinctively felt a conventional compassion that failed to satisfy her cravings. For the first time in her life she realized how cold a caress may be.

However, little by little the child's grief calmed down. Habit and *ennui* softened her regrets, lulled her by the monotonous hours, the discipline and unchangeable routine, the sameness of each succeeding day, in a life totally devoid of incidents and ever the same from morning till night ; getting up at five, cleaning the house, all the little ones taking their share, some sweeping, some making the beds, while others dragged the rugs into the yard and shook the dust of them into each other's faces. Then, at nine, soup, and lessons till twelve—reading, writing, sacred history, and the four rules of arithmetic ; at twelve, a dinner composed of soup and the meat from it, which they nicknamed

collet ; at one o'clock, a bell that summoned them back from the play-ground to the work-

room, where the needlework that helped to maintain

the establish-

ment was car-

ried on, the

youngest hem-

ming kitchen

cloths and the

more skilful

girls making

button - holes ;

at three, a slice

of bread and a

short recrea-

tion that broke

the stitching,

which was then

resumed till

seven o'clock ; after

that they had a supper of vegetables and

played till bed-time at nine.

Philomène now no longer cried ; she forgot

her plans of running away and was indeed

changed as though she had passed through

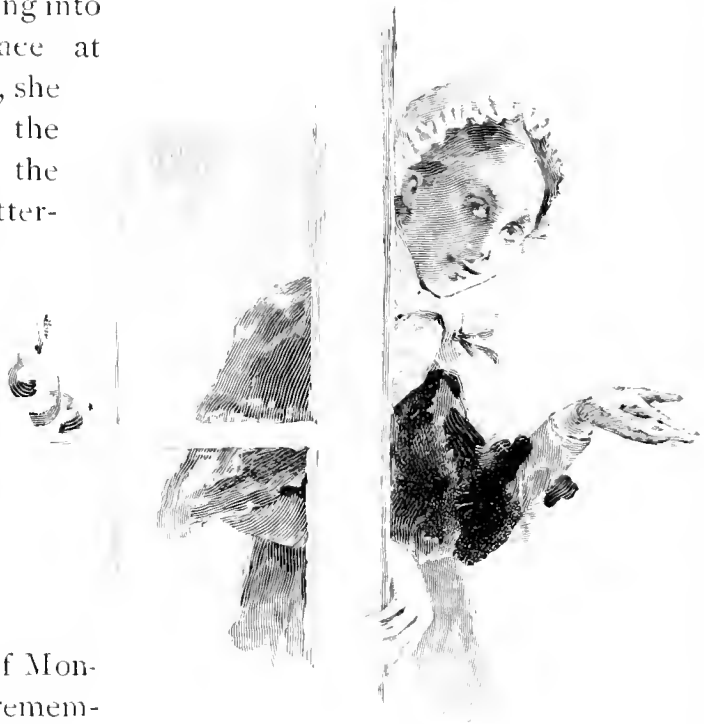
some severe illness. She who had formerly



been so lively, so turbulent, and so expansive had now lost all the sprightliness and vivacity of her character. During the recreations the Sisters had almost to force her to play. She became singularly quiet, slow even ; her voice drawling, her accent whining. She had the subdued, sad, depressed attitudes and gestures of a half-starved, shivering child. They were not dissatisfied with her at the convent ; she worked steadily, but without zeal. The Sisters only found fault with her for being a little lazy.

The passive life of the convent had, however, only outwardly affected the child's ardent nature. The quieter her body the more restless her brain. The whole week before the first Sunday of each month, the day her aunt came to see her, she was in a state of fever. When on that day the little girl was sent for to the parlor, she reached it so trembling and pale with emotion that two or three times her aunt had feared lest she should faint. Then all she had to relate since her aunt's previous visit hurried to her lips, strangling and choking her utterance ; she would begin phrases and suddenly stop short, gazing anxiously up into her aunt's face. And clinging to the old woman, who laughed but felt more inclined

to cry, half-seated on her aunt's chair, throwing her arms round her neck, she coaxed and forced her to put her cheek against her own, and thus raising her eyes and looking into her aunt's face at each question, she asked about the *concierge* of the house, the butter-woman of the street, Madame de Viry, and Monsieur Henry, inquiring if she was forgotten, if they still spoke of her, if Monsieur Henry remembered her, and when it would be his birthday that she might write to him. At one o'clock they parted. But the parlor door was hardly closed and the little one alone, when she would again half open the door, and putting her head in, with



a sad and roguish smile she would wave a last kiss to her aunt.

If by chance her aunt missed the twelve o'clock visit, from twelve to one the child felt as each one of her companions was summoned a painful shock, a blow at her heart, and she continued uneasy and restless the whole time of vespers. On the bench where she sat side by side with her playmates, one of a long row of small, white, motionless caps, her head was to be seen in constant agitation, turning and twisting round, displaying her anxious little countenance and eager, searching gaze, till at last she would catch sight of the blue ribbons in her aunt's cap amid the throng of other caps. On quitting the church the old woman would wait for her and return with her from the church door to the convent gates, the child insisting on her walking in the ranks and leaning on her arm in the street.

The Church loves to surround childhood with pretty and fresh faces. She knows how these little beings, in whom the soul is called to life through the senses, are impressed by the outward appearance of those around them ; she therefore strives to appeal to their eyes, to attract them by the charm of the women who

teach and tend them. The Church chooses for these duties the Sisters whose countenances are most pleasing and cheerful, for it seems as though she wished, by the smiling faces of the younger Sisters, to replace the absent mother's smile for the poor little orphans.

Of the ten Sisters who had charge of these orphans, nearly all were young, nearly all pretty; those even who had not regular features had a gentle glance, a



sweet smile that made them sympathetic and charming. One only formed an exception, and she, poor thing, was utterly devoid of grace.

This Sister was slightly humpbacked, one shoulder being higher than the other, spoke with a strong provincial accent that made her thoroughly ridiculous, and, moreover, had a face like a mask.

It was impossible to see or hear her without recalling Punch to mind. The children had nicknamed her Sister Carabosse. With the gestures of a man, she crossed her legs, stuck her arms akimbo in speaking, and stood with her hands behind her back. Her manners, too, were abrupt and rough, and at first sight her thick, black eyebrows inspired fear. Notwithstanding appearances, however, Sister Marguerite was the best of creatures. The small allowance her family—small land-owners in Périgord—gave her was entirely spent on cakes for the children when taken out walking. Seeing this little girl remain surly and lonely among companions of her own age, not joining even in their games, the kind Sister comprehended that there existed some wounded feeling, some need for consolation in the child whom the other Sisters, rebuffed in their first advances, now abandoned to her isolation. Instinctively she attached herself to Philomène, occupied herself with her during playtime, bought her a skipping-rope, and lightened her sewing task—in short, Philomène became her favorite, her adopted *protégée*. One day after lunch, without any apparent cause, Philomène threw herself into the Sister's arms and burst into tears, find-

ing no other way of thanking her. The Sister did not know what to say, for she also began to cry, without knowing why, when suddenly the child broke into a laugh, and her moist eyes brightened. As she raised her head she had just caught sight of the ridiculous appearance that Sister Carabosse presented with tears streaming down her cheeks.

From that moment Philomène became like her little companions ; a slightly serious look only remained on her otherwise open and frank countenance. She took pleasure in the amusements of her age, recovered the spirit, appetite, tastes, and boisterous health of youth, and eagerly joined in all the games. A spirit of emulation took possession of her, and she became interested in her work. She often thought of the large silver heart of the Virgin hanging in the oratory, with the names of the girls who had behaved best during the week pinned up around it ; and she envied all the badges distributed for assiduity in the work-room—the green ribbon and silver medal of the Infant Jesus, the red ribbon of Saint Louis of Gonzague, or the white ribbon of the Holy Angels.

Each week now brought its amusement, the Thursday's walk, now an intense pleasure,

which in early days had seemed so dull and mournful.

The Sisters nearly always took the little flock along the banks of the Canal Saint Martin. The children walked two by two, scattering as they passed along, in the mur-



mur of their voices, a sound like that of humming bees, watching a boy fishing, or a dog running up and down a barge, or a wheelbarrow trundled over a bending plank ; happy at the mere sight, and happy to breathe in and to listen to the echoes of Paris.

At the Feast of the Assumption, on the Mother Superior's *fête* day, and two or three other times a year, they went into the country,

and were usually taken to Saint-Cloud. They went through the park, crossed the bridge at Sèvres, wandered by the river-side, under the trees, till they reached a small inn at Surresnes. There in the arbors they crowded round the wooden tables, all stained with



purple wine, and feasted upon a large cream cheese, bought by Sister Marguerite.

These joyous, free, open-air treats, the romps in the tall grass, the wild flowers gathered under the willow-trees—all this impressed the excursion more lastingly on Philomène even than the others. She awoke on the ensuing mornings filled with these recollections, and when

the sight of the clouds, roads, and river had grown dim in her memory, she still retained of the country she no longer beheld a perfume, an echo, a sensation of sun ; and the scent of the trees, the rippling of the water came gently back to her as from afar.

One day more especially dwelt in her mind. They had, as they returned from the country, entered the grounds of a market-gardener. It was May. The luminous sky had an infinite though subdued transparency, like a white sky overspread with a softy shimmering veil of blue net. The atmosphere was sweet with the morning's breath. At moments a breeze gently shivered through the trees, and died away like a caress on the children's cheeks. In the tenderness of both sky and air, the pear, peach, cherry, and apricot trees blazed forth in a glory of blossom, silvery clusters nestling on every bough. Under the apple-trees a vast nosegay lay scattered over the red-brown earth, and the sun dancing through the foliage flitted like a bird over the snowy carpet of flowers. The radiant impression left by this vision of a soft and delicious Nature, decked as for a virginal feast, the dazzling orchard caught sight of in its tender springtide of candor and freshness-

all this lived like a dream in the heart of little Philomène.

Little by little the singular persistency of her sensations, the unconscious faculty for retaining a vision, as it were, of things gone by, made the child more impressionable, and developed in her an acute state of sensitiveness. She grew melancholy, and was almost angered at any caress bestowed by the Sisters on the other little girls ; a word or a question addressed to another wounded her as a slight or neglect. She had such a craving for tenderness and affection that any kindness displayed to others seemed something robbed from her ; and this dread, of which she was herself ashamed ; this torture which she hid, was betrayed by an unreasoning jealousy. One day the whole convent went to spend the afternoon at Madame de Mareuil's near Lagny. Madame de Mareuil was the benefactress of the convent, and every year gave a great lunch to the little orphans. At the end of the day, while the carriages were conveying them home, the little ones having had a sip of champagne, all talked at the same time, recalling out loud, as if it were a fairy tale, the wonderful things they had seen—the moat full of water, the great

gilded gates, the avenues with festoons of ivy, clinging in garlands from tree to tree, and the satin-covered chairs, and the great gallery where the family portraits gazed down on them as they ate, and the boundless park, the marble statues, and the hot-house flowers they did not even know the name of, that looked like wax. Philomène, in the midst of the noise, admiration, and exclamations, alone remained unmoved and silent.

“Well, you little dumb thing,” said Sister Marguerite, “you do not say anything. Was it not all fine enough to please you? What do you mean by being so quiet? Come, come, I know : you would have liked to have been with the big girls, and the lady to notice you. I know what you are, you like—” And the Sister, stopping short, heaved a compassionate sigh as she looked at the child. That night, before Philomène dropped off to sleep, she felt Sister Marguerite gently pull her blanket up over her hands and her uncovered shoulders.

All the kindly Sister's care and attention could not, however, wrest the child's heart from the memory of the Rue de la Chaussée d'Antin. Her thoughts continually turned toward her aunt, toward Madame de Viry

and Monsieur Henry. As in the past, the first Sundays in the month were the most eventful days in her life. If she trembled less when called to the parlor, she still had the same tender caress for her aunt, and exacted always the same promise from the old woman



—that when she would be old enough she should return to Madame de Viry's—with a query of "*That is certain, is it not?*" full of an anxiety that rose from the very depths of her being.

Besides these Sundays, three weeks in the year also caused Philomène the deepest emotion. These were the eight days preceding New Year's Day, the eight days preceding Madame de Viry's *fête* day, and the eight

days before that of her aunt. All that time she lived a double kind of existence, pondering over the letter of good wishes she longed to make so fine. Long in advance she had bought some pretty writing-paper with initials surrounded by a wreath of embossed roses ; with what embarrassment and diffidence did she strive to set forth well-rounded phrases, similar to those she read in books ! What care she took in writing to close the *a*'s well, to make no blots ! Once her letter ended, signed, and sealed with a transparent wafer, what machinations for it to arrive just on the eve of the *fête* day !

Philomène was ten years old when a little girl two years older than herself entered the orphanage. On seeing each other for the first time, the two children went toward one another with the impulse and natural instinct of children that have already met. This spontaneous affection was cemented the following day at play-time by a present the new-comer, Céline, made to Philomène. For many a day this present seemed to Philomène the most lovely thing in the world. It was an embossed and stamped envelope imitating net, and on it was displayed a vase whereon was written, in gilt letters surrounded by gold

flourishes, the word, *Souvenir* : from this envelope could be drawn forth a nosegay of painted cut-out lilac that opened like a fan with seven sticks, on each of which a little printed medallion displayed the Infant Jesus lying in the manger, surrounded by kneeling children. Philomène had carefully shut up and hid this beautiful gift in her mass-book ; the first days she constantly gazed at it, touched it, unfolded it, looking at the pictures and reading the litany printed round them : “ *O Jesus! divine Saviour, as my New Year’s gift accept my heart.*”

The two little ones soon became intimate friends, and whenever they could be together were never apart. They shared everything that their friends brought them, even their butter and sugar. Their thoughts, joys, disappointments were one. In the playground they were always seen together, sometimes with an arm thrown round the neck or slipped round the waist of the other, absorbed the while in ceaseless conversation ; and they walked to and fro in the yard linked together in some pretty child-like gesture, confidentially leaning on one another ; Philomène with large eyes, long lashes, slow glance, and full, half-parted lips, rosy and rather tanned

cheeks, and amber-colored locks straying from under her cap ; Céline with rounded, prominent forehead, naturally curly hair, small, clear, deep-set gray eyes, open nostrils, thin lips, dimpled chin, and oval face. After a few turns, they would often sit down on the stone bench near the pump ; even in winter they sat there for a quarter of an hour at a time, huddled up in print gowns that through the poor thin folds betrayed a thick woollen knitted vest, the tips of their shapeless list shoes resting on the ground ; and they remained there, overcome with cold, silent and motionless, taking an indolent pleasure in the numbing sensation, while they gazed into space, Philomène looking at some bird, Céline watching a passing cloud.

Until her entry into the convent Céline had been the little nurse and maid of an infirm grandmother. Her childhood had been lulled and charmed by the *Lives of the Saints*. The old woman read a few pages out loud every evening, opening the book with her gouty fingers at the page she had marked the previous day. Then, as she grew older, Céline in her turn took the big book on her lap, and read to her grandmother. She had learned to read in that book ; in it her imagination had spelt

out its first letters, and this her first alphabet was the initiation of her life.

The miracles, adventures, self-sacrifices, heroisms, glorious agonies, divine deaths, half-revealed heavens, showers of palms, had dazzled her like a fairy-tale of miracles. The legends of the *Legende dorée* filled her brain and seemed to swell her forehead—a forehead resembling that of Memling's little Virgin—almost deformed by the bump of the marvellous. A magic world stood out of these pages, as thrilling as that by which a nurse awakens the first dream and stimulates the reasoning of a child. She found in the history of these saints and martyrs, so full of phantoms, monsters, and metamorphoses, the raptures, the enthrallment, the emotions, the sweet horror of phantasmagoria, and the ideal reality that fairy tales convey to a being of her age ; and as by the side of the old woman nothing came to disturb the illusions of the child, as neither doubt nor smile ever startled the naïve warmth of her impressions, or her first trust and faith, for her the path strewn with Hop-o'-my-Thumb's crumbs was represented by the desert road planted by Saint Macaire with a willow-tree at every mile ; the talking bird of Indian

tales was the grasshopper that roused Saint Gregory from sleep ; and the water that sang was the block of ice imploring Saint Theobald to say masses for the soul shut up within it. She did not behold visions of palaces with diamond gates, conjured up by the wave of a wand, in which Golden Locks had been slumbering for some hundred years ; but she dreamed of the golden ladders touching the ground, of the pathway magnificently carpeted and dazzling with light, that led a saint's soul from a cell to celestial glory. Even her terrors in the dark were not the usual terrors of a child ; she did not fancy she saw an ogre nor a bogey nor thieves ; but outlined in the obscurity, as by a coal of fire, drawing quite close to her in her sleeplessness, was the devil, such as she had seen him in the legend, tempting a saint.

In the day-time, the land of saints unrolled itself before her in a radiant and confused perspective. She repeated words that in her ears sounded like the noise of a shell from the Eastern waters, and the name of a certain King Gondoforus brought to her the sonorous echo of a far-off kingdom. Then the vaults of heaven seemed to open and angelic voices silenced the voice of man. " You don't talk

to-day ? ” the grandmother would sometimes say to her while the little girl mechanically plied her needle, hemming a towel or darning a stocking. The child merely answered by a smile—she was dreaming of solitude, deserts, a hermitage in a corner of the Monceaux plain, just beyond Paris, in a spot she had seen.

Lifting her above the realities of life, these thoughts and dreams made Céline’s life happy ; but soon a mere passive and ideal communion with this miraculous history did not suffice for her ; the long martyrology, ever ready with sacrifices and oblations to God, incited her to self-immolation. She strove to martyrize herself, silently, as best she could. She chastised her innocent little senses, deprived herself of her favorite dishes, imposed on herself the recital of a certain number of *Aves* as she walked down a street. She took vows of silence for half a day. When she went to bed, heavy with sleep, she would force herself to remain awake several hours till a time she had previously fixed on ; or when her grandmother offered her an excursion or a treat, she punished herself for the very wish she had to accept, saying she was ill and going to bed. Church-going, confession, and her first Com-

munion had developed this mystic temperament. Céline had subtilized all these little self-sacrifices, and by dint of sharpening and reiterating her petty torments, by the ingenuity and detail she exerted, had carried them to the verge of cruelty. She took a certain pride in putting to the test her sickly and childish little body, already eager and strong



for suffering. The stories of young Christian girls brought before the proconsul, from whose wounded

limbs, when torn by iron rakes, milk flowed instead of blood, had always been an attraction and a temptation for her.

Philomène, more delicate, more sensitive, less dreamy and more tender, was constantly censured and lectured by Céline. Céline, with a zeal of proselytism that already kindled and purified her friendships and affections, had taken to heart the task of strengthening and guiding a soul that she considered feeble and idle. By persuasion and advice, by the influence of earnest words and example, little by little she lifted her companion out of the weaknesses and natural disposition of her age.

She inveigled her into a course of little sacrifices, not, however, without struggles and much patience. She had to gain ground inch by inch, be ready each day to go over all again, make unceasing efforts of reasoning, use irony without bitterness, anxious prayers and supplications against Philomène's



pleadings, her timid opposition, resistance and excuses for her lukewarmness.

Often Philomène would complain, say she was not strong enough, that so much must not be demanded of her. Céline was never at a loss for an answer. She was always ready to quote an example, the virtue of some saint or another to which they must aspire. And she replied to the murmuring of her

soul as she had replied to those of her body the day that Philomène expressed disgust at the boiled beef given them for every dinner :

“ Ah ! my dear, remember Saint Angèle : three walnuts, three chestnuts, three figs, and three leeks, that was all she ate, and bread only on Sunday ; and you dare to grumble ! ”

A nature like Philomène's was easily influenced and ready to submit ; she expanded under the inspiration Céline strove to kindle and rouse within her. When, during the recreations, the giddy little ones of the convent came and sang round them :

I love wine,
I love onion,
I love Suzon,

Céline and she replied :

I love the convent,
Love the convent,
Love the convent.

Her friend's faith was hers also, but her character lent it her own form and expression. What in Céline was a hidden and concentrated fire was with her an overflowing flame ; her exaltation became an expansion.

The Sisters were surprised and delighted

at this change. They saw a special grace in this sudden conversion of a child who till then had shown but a careless and indifferent piety, and whom they now quoted to the other little girls as a model of fervent faith, regularity, and punctuality.

Every day on awakening Philomène crossed herself and offered up her first thoughts to God. While dressing she prayed for the robe of innocence lost by original sin. Before beginning her work she laid it all at the Lord's feet in expiation of her errors. She never forgot to murmur a short prayer at the strike of the hour. At nine o'clock she thought as she prayed of the Holy Ghost, who at that hour had on Whit-Sunday descended on the Apostles; at twelve she invoked the Angel Gabriel. Before dinner she went through a short examination of her faults while reciting a *Miserere*. Before play-time she asked God to guard her speech. At the hour when Jesus gave up the ghost, she besought him to attach her to his cross so that she could never leave it. Then followed other short prayers—prayers to remember the presence of God, prayers whenever she had committed any trifling fault. In the evening, before getting into bed, she never failed to pray and kiss

the floor three times. If she awoke at night, she joined in thought those servants of God who sing his praises during the night hours ; she joined in the worship of the blessed saints, the songs of the angelic host in Paradise, and then endeavored to go to sleep again in an attitude becoming in God's sight, such as she would wish for if death came and surprised her.

The time for Philomène's first Communion drew near while she was yet in the fervor aroused by her friend's influence. It was a great event in her childish existence. Thoroughly prepared by the weekly catechism class, she was filled and agitated by emotion. The week preceding the great and momentous Sunday, a retreat consisting of a course of exercises, instructions, and exhortations stimulated her zeal and ardor. This withdrawal from life and external thought, the meditation and fascination of the long vigils, the constantly evoked images of the flesh and blood of Christ, the mysterious joy of a union with God, threw Philomène into a kind of mystical rapture. Abstinence, fasting, the natural feebleness of a body ill-nourished by the meagre convent fare, all contributed to deaden her faculties and increase her ecstatic

condition. Under the spiritual exaggeration and nervous irritation of constant prayer she was alternately thrown into transports of adoration or crushed and bowed down by



contrition. All her blood seemed to rush to her head and heart. She was shaken all over by inward agitation, by the passionate longing of her childish imagination thirsting for love. She would quit the confessional bathed in tears, happy to feel them streaming down her cheeks till they reached and moistened her lips. It was a passionate aspiration toward

all that the first approach to the mystery of the sacrament can bring to an excitable child of twelve—new sensations, inner revelations, unknown ardors. She fancied she had a call ; a new conscience seemed to awake within her ; she felt as if she had dismissed one part of her life, and abruptly entered upon another ; as though the veil of her childish soul were torn asunder in a first assumption of womanly character and moral responsibility.

At last the great day came. Philomène had begged her aunt to bring her some eau-de-cologne and some scented pomatum. When she entered the church, in the midst of the other communicants, she stood as if transfixed ; she could neither hear nor see anything around her, and was so moved that she hardly knew what she was doing. There seemed to be a great hum and roar in her and around her ; the fragrance of the cosmetics she had used enveloped her, and she inhaled them as a breath of Paradise, not realizing that they emanated from her own person. Rays of light streamed through the church, throwing the jewel-like color of the stained-glass windows over the altar. A bluish vapor rose in the dusty daylight. The lighted

tapers threw their sparkle upon the white frocks. In the nave voices mingled with perfumes, and prayers with hymns. The censers swung back with a broken sound in the white-gloved hands. But for Philomène there was nothing but the altar, and on the altar nothing but the tabernacle. She gazed steadfastly at it, and by a wonderful effort riveted her inner sight as well, forcing both mind and vision to pierce through the mist which after long gazing shrouds all things from our view, till she fancied she fathomed the mysterious depths of the gilded shrine, as the sun is divined behind the hill that hides it by the faint light it leaves above.

As the girls on the bench rose, she rose too. Her turn came and she received the Host. As she partook of it, she felt an ineffable sensation of faintness, a rapture that was almost a swoon.

From this day the church became for Philomène a calm, holy spot, tender and familiar, like some well-remembered room of childhood's home, full of tender memories of a mother's love.

She waited impatiently for Sunday, when she would go there, live there a whole day, lingering on from service to service.

Nevertheless, Saint Laurent, where the Sisters took the children, was but a shabby little church. Situated at the top of the Boulevard de Strasbourg, and now standing clear from its surroundings, it looked like an old country church, abandoned in the middle of a lonely square, in which maybe some rope-maker carried on his trade.

Inside it was cold and bare ; one felt it to be the poverty-stricken parish church of the two faubourgs, the Faubourg Saint Denis and the Faubourg Saint Martin. Not a sound was to be heard under the severely arched roof, along the gray and dirty walls ; at times only the dragging step of slipshod clogs over the pavement, or a harsh and hollow cough broke the silence. The congregation was of the poorest class : a second-hand dealer in clothes with a colored handkerchief on her head, a maid carrying home some small family dinner tied up in a cloth, a coal-woman who hissed between her lips a silent prayer, a mother with a basket, and a child in her arms over whom she makes the sign of the cross as she enters, or a seamstress praying with bent head, and finger-tips roughened by the needle raised to her mouth. Women in mourning, with old black dresses, bonnets, and veils

turned rusty, pass through the aisles. Close by the iron railings of the side chapels other old women in linen caps may be seen, with fixed gaze, dilated pupils, and eyes upraised, mumbling prayers. At times also in a corner some bent old man in a shabby blue coat whitened at the seams would kneel humbly on the ground. Philomène, however, did not notice the melancholy aspect of Saint Laurent. She did not see that the church was miserable, for she was happy there, and it seemed to her that her pleasure was due to the place itself and its belongings. She was conscious of a vague sensation of comfort and infinite peace, a dreamy idleness and languid satisfaction. The spell she was under while seated in the nave gave her the sensation of a balmy and soothing climate, and the penetrating, subtle atmosphere of the church seemed to her that of an ideal fatherland.

She was awed on entering by the cold touch of the holy water, she enjoyed the smell of the lighted tapers and dying incense, and the fading perfume of burnt balm and wax that pervaded the whole church. She delighted in the peaceful calm, broken only now and again by a soft step, the rustle of a dress, the leaves of a book turned over, the murmur of

praying lips. The organ lulled her with a harmony and melody that rocked and soothed her, and she abandoned herself to the burst of sound, to the tempest of noise that swept over her, to the celestial chorus that throbbed in her temples and reëchoed in her heart. She listened in unconscious rapture to the chant of the priests and choristers, which from the depths of the chapels was responded to from afar by voices young and old. And at vespers, she was deliciously stirred by one of the voices in the choir, a high, thin head voice, tender and penetrating, which seemed to send up on high an echo of the Passion.

The voices, music, atmosphere, and perfume of the church always affected her more and more sweetly as the day wore on. Her thoughts floated more dreamily in the waning light that sent from the windows a snowy reflection on the confessionals and confusedly mingled its fading whiteness with the rose-colored light of the tapers and lamps. She sat there, almost sleeping, indulging with a secret delight in the dreams and illusions created by the uncertain light, letting her gaze wander before her over the already dusky chapels, the shadowy nooks and corners round the choir, where the whiteness of a cap, a

colorless complexion, the blackness of a shawl or dress, the white edge of a petticoat vaguely outlined some feminine shadows seated on a bench. And when at the end of the last service the shuffling of the chairs drew her from this torpor, she was roused from it like a person abruptly startled out of a dream. Soon the church was to become more precious still to her. Behind the door, at the apse of Saint Laurent, is a chapel toward which all the poor direct their steps as they enter.

In front of it, in the sombre recess of an angle of the wall, stand four rows of little thin tapers stuck on tall prongs fastened into a wooden pedestal, flickering with the fitful and uncertain light of tallow, and throwing a vacillating glimmer into the surrounding gloom. By their faint gleam can just be discerned a dark shadow huddled up against the wooden base, a crushed, abandoned body, bent double like a Christ taken down from the cross, a creature muffled up in a hooded cloak, out of which a hand only is stretched to receive the penny for each taper. The chapel opens at the side; and on a white and gold altar, covered with lace over faded blue silk, in the midst of tiers of artificial flowers under glass shades, a white Virgin,

bearing on her bosom seven flaming gold hearts hanging to a white watered ribbon—"Our Lady of Sorrow"—stands out from a background of azure and golden rays emanating from a triangle. Pretty, smiling, and gentle like any young queen, she gracefully upholds on a globe an infant Jesus, who, bedecked with rosaries and medals, seems only intent on playing with Saint John. Above the altar, on a carved frontal, painted green to imitate marble, is written up in great blue letters: "*Confraternity of the Blessed and Immaculate Mother of God, Our Lady of the Sick. Privileged Altar.*"

Madame de Viry had fallen ill with a malady that was to end fatally after a long year of suffering, and Philomène obtained permission from the Sisters to go and pray every Sunday in this chapel "dedicated to the sick." She remained near the entry by the side of the wall covered with white marble tablets, on which were inscribed in golden letters the following outbursts of gratitude: "*O Mary, 20th April, 18—: I called upon Mary and she heard my prayer.*"—"O Mary, be my mother!" She would remain on her knees there for more than an hour at a time, and amid all the women—mothers,

[illegible][illegible][illegible]

bright like that of a child fresh from play, was fading away, and her lips, no longer red, had assumed a violet tinge. She was getting pallid, and her hands grew whiter and thinner.

She was overcome by a general feeling of discomfort ; aches and pains seemed every day to affect a different part of her body, leaving an intense weariness of both mind and body. She rose from her bed with fatigue, and going up-stairs or running made her heart beat so violently that she had constantly to rest. The least work required an effort, a battle with self. Involuntarily she let herself sink into a drowsiness that numbed her thoughts and feelings. She vaguely thought of death, talked to her aunt of Madame de Viry's grave, recalled to mind two of her little companions who had died at her age—not that she wished to die, but the idea haunted her ; she wondered to whom she should leave her prayer-book, who would have her little pictures, her confirmation medal. When she read her mass-book she instinctively turned to the prayers for the dead, taking delight in certain Latin words of that service that sounded dark and gloomy. She did not conjure up these fancies, but felt drawn toward

them by mysterious voices. And these thoughts did not fill her with the terror they inspire to older people, who cling to life and are unable to tear themselves away from it. Philomène considered the possibility of death without fear, almost with indifference, and although she did not invite it, she did not repel the idea. She had grown accustomed to the thought, and she would have accepted death with the unconcern and disregard for life so often seen in young girls before they attain womanhood.

Her piety was increased by these ideas ; she became more zealous, more ecstatic. She pondered upon all the words by which the Church conjures up the image of death and its negation. She dwelt with a certain bitter delight on the images and expressions of woe scattered here and there through her mystical books of piety, like black crosses in a cemetery.

If, however, her piety had become more fervent, her temper had lost its equanimity, and Philomène, who till then had been so gentle, was now irritable and impatient. She gave way to anger even with Céline, and would burst into tears when her friend asked what was the matter. Some days she could

not help crying. The Sisters found her lacking in deference and cheerful alacrity ; she manifested a dislike to washing up the dishes, cooking the dinner, all the different services she had to perform in her turn, and she showed her dislike by a cross and sulky manner ; in fact, she was quite an altered person. Her appetite, too, became capricious, full of whimsical fancies, which denial only exasperated. For two months she kept teasing her aunt to bring her a pot of mustard, which the old woman always forgot. Then her eyes became affected, and she suffered from ophthalmia. The Sister in charge of the dispensary attended to her, but ointments proved of no avail ; the disease increased, and it was therefore decided that Philomène should be sent to Monsieur Nelaton's gratuitous consultation, held every Thursday at the School of Medicine. As this would have wasted a whole day for the Sister who taught or the Sister who looked over the work-room, her aunt was requested to take charge of her on that day. Her aunt came an hour earlier than Philomène expected, as she wished to take her niece home to breakfast, and to show Monsieur Henry how tall the girl had grown.

The child hardly spoke to her aunt as they went along, so anxious was she to reach home, and she walked on ahead, hastening by her feverish pace the lagging steps of the



old woman, who hurried to overtake her. At last they reached the street, the house, the stairs, and, finally, the door of the new apartment Monsieur Henry had taken after his mother's death. Immediately the door

was opened Philomène dashed in ; she wanted to see everything, look at everything ; such a thing was new, that other she remembered of old ; and she went from one thing to another, touching the relics of her childhood, or marvelling at all the unknown and astonishing refinements of a young man's newly furnished rooms. And when she timidly entered Monsieur Henry's room, clinging like a child to her aunt's gown, her heart throbbed violently.

Monsieur Henry, in a blue jacket and trousers embroidered in red, stood in front of a mirror fastened by the handle to the window. He was shaving himself with the proud and busy mien of a lad of twenty shaving for the third time in his life, and thereby assuming the importance of a man. "Ah ! it's your little girl," he said, raising his head to shave under his chin ; "my beard is so hard." And then, turning round half-shaved, holding his tortoise-shell razor on high : "Oh ! I should not have known you again ; what a big girl you are ! Well, are you pleased to come out to spend the day with your aunt ? Ah ! yes, it's true your eyes are bad ; it won't be anything serious. Leave them alone." Then addressing himself to her aunt : "I hope you are going to give her a good breakfast. Now,

where are my varnished boots? I am going out."

When Philomène went back at four o'clock she was left for a few minutes in the parlor while her aunt explained to the Sister the oculist's prescription and the treatment that must be followed. The pale gray daylight was on the wane, and its cold gleams whitened the window curtains and threw dim and colorless reflections on the chocolate-colored walls, on the worn tiles, on the polished wood-work of the chairs, on the wicker arm-chair of the Sister-Superintendent, on the great walnut press in which the linen sent to be hemmed or marked by the children in the orphanage was kept. Nothing was changed in the parlor, everything was in its accustomed place, and yet everything there now looked unfamiliar to the little girl. She seemed to see with different eyes the two lithographic portraits of the Mothers-Superior in the black wooden frames; the wax figure of the Virgin over the mantelpiece, the china vases with *Marie* in gilt letters upon them, and the tawdry hawthorn nosegay of faded yellow paper. She wondered what had happened to the room and its contents that she found it so different. Looking mechanically round the parlor and

noticing for the first time its cold, bare, and icy aspect, she suddenly felt a sensation of forlornness, the anguish of isolation, like that she had felt on the day she first entered the convent.

Céline, who had anxiously been awaiting her return, threw her arms round her neck when she saw her, and plied her with questions about the doctor, what he had said and ordered. Philomène answered shortly in a few words, and began quickly to tell her of the lovely apartment she had been to, of her aunt's kitchen and its look-out on trees, and of the little room where her aunt said she would work when she would have left the convent. And all she had seen that seemed to her so fine, magnificent, fascinating, and unknown hurried to her lips, that trembled with emotion and smiled at the recollection. It was a headlong outpouring, which only stopped for her to take breath in a caress or in a kiss, and ran on inexhaustibly from story to story, from the trimmed cap her aunt had tried on her to the lather of soap Monsieur Henry had stuck on her cheek in kissing her. At last Philomène perceived that Céline remained silent, and did not seem to share in her ecstasy.

“Philomène,” Céline now said in a gentle, solemn tone, “when we are in bed to-night we will make a spiritual retreat in the tomb of Christ, and implore him to grant us a love for meditation and contemplation.”

After this episode Philomène was seized afresh with a paroxysm of fervor and piety. Giving to prayer all the time she could possibly devote to it, she strove, as it were, to prolong its echo within her by keeping up during her work a murmur of prayer on her lips and a constant thought of it in her mind.

During play-time she wrote religious exercises ; she confessed and communicated whenever she was permitted to do so, and at Saint Laurent, during mass and vespers, she was so completely absorbed that nothing had the power to withdraw her attention nor turn her thoughts from God.

This enthusiasm lasted nearly two years. Then it seemed to her as if little by little an unknown power that she could hardly subdue, and which must eventually conquer her, were taking possession of her. Her peace of mind, her will even, disappeared amid the fears and anxieties she could not suppress. When she wished to pray she no longer found the same facility, the same inclination that had for-

merly borne her along without an effort. The Divine Presence became to her only an idea instead of a sensation, and Philomène was still convinced but no longer penetrated by it. All the spiritual food that had till now sustained her had in the same way become tasteless and had lost its invigorating sweetness. Now her faith had no raptures and suavity to uphold her against the bitterness, melancholy, discontent, impatience, and restless agitations with which her conscience was struggling. She felt temptations draw round her, and these temptations, which it would formerly have hardly cost her a moment's reflection to cast aside, now preoccupied her like a fixed idea, and, by dint of dreading them, she fell under their haunting influence. At the same time, in the midst of all this languor and cooling fervor, her defenceless soul was harassed by an ideal of perfection which it could not attain, but toward which it was forever bounding as in a paroxysm of fever, with aspirations, resolutions, and longings, by vows of rules and penitence. Then, worn out by clutching at this phantom of holiness, she sank back into restlessness and uncertainty. She secretly rebelled against mortifications; her obedience was no longer eager, her im-

agination was a torture, and whatever will she had left seemed to her a will from which all grace had fled.

Thus did this soul, which had known all the joy of absorption in God, strive and waste away in the struggle. Each day destroyed something, extinguished some ardor ; each day aggravated the disease so deadly to faith, the disease the Church calls *dryness*, comparing, as it does, the souls that suffer from it to arid lands without water. And the more she struggled, the more she strove to cure the evil, the more she eagerly strained toward that ideal of perfection she had neglected to seek for in the hour of health and repose—the more she suffered, and the more her mind was confused and uncertain. Disbelief alone could end this conflict, in which the poor child was torn to pieces by her own thoughts, and Philomène had not yet reached that state. She prayed, nevertheless, but was not comforted.

Why did those things that formerly appealed to her no longer touch her ? Often and often she sadly turned back to her prayer-book, a shabby little leather-covered book with a gold line round it and blue-tinted edges, a book similar to every other of the

kind published by Adrien Leclerc, printer to our Holy Father the Pope, and to his Grace the Archbishop of Paris. In order to protect it she had encased it in a neatly stitched black merino wrapper, fastened by a couple of dark mother-of-pearl buttons and loops that made a kind of clasp. Between the cover and the binding she had placed all the scraps of paper she had relating to her aunt and Madame de Viry, and the few letters she had ever received. In the book itself, the edges of which were so faded and thumbed that they had assumed the color of dry moss, she had crammed between every page—till the volume was nearly bursting—a number of sacred images, prayers to the Sacred Heart, and flowers picked during her walks, which for her represented memorable dates. This book, the book of her first Communion, the receptacle of her souvenirs and her hopes, she had prized as a relie and a friend. Now she opened it, turned over the leaves, and saw nothing more in it than in other books—lines and letters—and she closed it again as a thing dead. Céline saw Philomène's struggles, and strove to aid and calm her. She longed to endow her with some of her strength of will, resolution, simple faith, and the senti-

ment of vocation that time only made more certain and powerful ; but Philomène, self-shamed, rebuffed her, and finally begging to be left alone, drew herself away from her friend. Then Céline would send her notes every evening after supper, asking her to kiss her when they met on their way to the dormitory, and with this kiss, in which she would have wished to seize hold of Philomène's soul and bear it away to God, Céline would slip into her hand a little folded paper, carefully ruled, on which she had written in copy-book handwriting : *Gifts of piety that render God's service pleasant and sweet ;* or else, *Fruit of Charity that unites us to God through love.* When Philomène's evening kiss was cold or indifferent, or that she seemed merely to put up her cheek from habit, instead of the little papers, Céline would slip into her hand long letters, scribbled in pencil unknown to the Sisters : " God has put into my heart an affection pleasing to him. I shall strive to be with you what I think God wishes ; for he commands us not only to love him, but also to make him be loved. I trust that if you pray to Mary she may receive you amongst her children, and then we will strive by our good example to kindle in the hearts

of our companions the desire to become one of her family. Be more devout, and I will pray God Almighty to help you." Such were the tone and phraseology of these letters, which Céline always signed : "*Her who is always your friend in the blessed hearts of Jesus and Mary.*" This went on, till at last Philomène, wearied out, impatiently, angrily even, pushed aside the scribbled scraps of paper Céline held out to her.

Philomène now found a diversion and relief in some new fancies that had taken possession of her. Thoughts of marriage ran through her brain, not, indeed, as a settled plan, but vaguely, confusedly, softly veiled, like objects visible in the distance. She did not think of any one in particular whom she would wish to marry ; she had no precise notion indeed about marriage, but turned to the thought instinctively and calmly as something that might be. And her imagination conjured up the pure, white-robed figure, which, to a little girl, is *the* lasting impression left of a wedding—the white dress and wreath of orange-blossoms. Then at times she dreamed of still greater happiness, of a community of spirit, a two-fold existence, of devotedness, of mysterious joys that she

knew not, for which she knew no name, but which must surely dawn on the horizon of a new life.

She was still an innocent child, knowing nothing, divining nothing; her ingenuousness was also greater than usual at her age; for instance, on one occasion, when several of her playmates, the eldest of whom was younger than herself, were talking together, one of them happened to say :

“ Did you see how Berthe blushed when she met her cousin in the parlor ? Certainly she has a liking for him.”

“ How silly you are,” retorted another ; “ it does not make you blush ; it makes you turn pale.”

“ Dear me ! ” said Philomène, “ I thought one only turned pale when hurt.”

Two great voids were suddenly created in Philomène's existence. Sister Marguerite was sent to the south for a few months to recruit her health, and Céline left the orphanage to begin her novitiate at the Mother House of the Sisters of Saint Augustine.

From this moment the convent life became insupportable to Philomène ; it was worse than solitude. She was seized with desperate

longings to leave it, to run away and go to her aunt. The atmosphere, the walls, the very sky overhead, all became odious to her, and her health gave way under the *ennui* that devoured her both body and soul. The Sisters became anxious and allowed her aunt to visit her oftener ; the convent fare, that seemed to disgust Philomène so that she hardly touched it, was replaced by more delicate food. Notwithstanding all this care, Philomène grew paler and thinner, and her eyes seemed larger and more feverish in her wan little face. One day, after six months, on the occasion of a visit from her aunt, she threw herself into the old woman's arms, and hugging her and crying at the same time, implored her to take her away, saying she would die there, that she felt as if some serious illness were hanging over her. Her aunt had need of all her courage to reply that it was quite impossible to take her away, that she was still too young ; but she promised to have her home when she would be twenty, and when, in all probability, Monsieur Henry would be married and she could be his wife's maid. A last tear rolled down Philomène's cheek, but she did not utter a word.

At the end of a week her aunt received a

letter in which Philomène said she was very sorry for the scene she had made, that she had waited a few days to see if her good resolutions held out. The letter ended as follows:



" . . . I hope that by the grace of God and the advice of our good Mother Superior this will not occur again. I shall not leave this establishment, but, by the will of God and your consent, perhaps I shall only leave it to enter—I say no more at present ; time will speak for me." Her aunt, attaching no im-

portance to this last phrase, was quite reassured by the letter. However, the anxiety of the Sisters was awakened, two or three of their young girls having died of a decline similar to that Philomène was suffering from. They noticed that Philomène eat nothing at meals; she even tried to disguise the fact by hiding her bread up her sleeves. The convent doctor declared, after examining Philomène, that her digestive organs were already affected, and the Sisters, alarmed, sent at once for her aunt, who, hearing what the doctor had said, immediately took the child away.

Monsieur Henry was just then travelling in Italy; the old woman could therefore devote all her time to her niece, amuse her and take her out walking during her convalescence. And holding out to the poor girl the prospect of a future in which they should always be together, telling her how useful she would be to her in her old age, she gradually and gently brought back to life and hope this crushed and weary heart.

One morning the door-bell rang loudly. It was Monsieur Henry.

“How do you do, old woman? All right, eh?” said the young man. “Ah! this is your

niece. How pale she is ! I say, your aunt tells me you have become deuced pious." And he burst out laughing and kissed her on both cheeks. Philomène trembled all over.

"Give me a match—you must take care of yourself," resumed Monsieur Henry, puffing away at a cigar, "and not do too much. Get out my clothes, old woman ; I want to take a turn on the boulevards. Has a letter come from the Rue des Martyrs ? By the bye, I've brought you something, Philomène—a rosary—one blessed at Rome. It is somewhere in my box. Ah ! while I think of it, I am going to confide to you a most important charge—you will see that my shirts have all the buttons on."

Whereupon Monsieur Henry went out, and did not return till the following day.

From that time Monsieur Henry's service became Philomène's sole preoccupation. She taxed her ingenuity and strove to surprise him by her thoughtful attentions. She endeavored to find out his favorite habits and pet fancies. Never was a stitch wanting to Monsieur Henry's gloves ; his pipes were always clean ; the smallest details of his toilet were as carefully attended to as though the eye of an old-fashioned provincial mother had scrutinized

and inspected them. All the knick-knacks in his room, which her old aunt often left undusted and in disorder, were now carefully tidied and neatly placed ready to his hand. Monsieur Henry seemed delighted at being so well served, but he scarcely thanked Philomène, except by an absent "Good-day," or some broad, good-natured joke. At breakfast, while Philomène waited on him, he was absorbed in the newspaper, propped against his glass, and hardly vouchsafed her a "thank you." After breakfast and three pipes smoked in silence, he would take up his hat and disappear for the day.

This bachelor establishment, giving but little work to the aunt and niece, left their evenings free. When the winter months came round, the old woman, not knowing how to keep herself awake, acquired the habit of going down into the porter's lodge, where all the different servants of the house met and in turns treated each other to tea. First there was the porter with a *pince-nez* that he affectedly toyed with—a short, fat widower, well informed on money matters, and knowing how to turn his money to account in all sorts of investments and underhand loans. Then there was a fellow with a brown-bread

complexion and coarse red lips, the groom of a stock-broker living on the first floor, and who, owing to his master's encouragements—the said master being flattered by his style—tried with a hoarse voice to catch the low tone of the servants in the plays at the Palais Royal. Then there was the cook of the lady on the second floor—a foreign lady, who ostensibly gave card-parties and was said to be a Russian spy—a big Flemish woman, always half-tipsy, bursting with fat and exploding with laughter and low mirth. Often, too, this Flemish woman would bring her husband, the most villanous type of cab-driver, a man whose nose and forehead exhaled alcohol at all hours of the day, and his chin, disfigured by some skin disease, was half hidden in a filthy muffler. Two or three flighty maids of disreputable women, ferret-featured and coarse-mouthed, made up this select society, to which may be added the nurse of a paralyzed man, her red nose adorned by a black wart.

These people were indeed enough to make one sick. The men and women reeked of wine, corruption, envy, sloth—all the vices of domesticity. Their instincts and tastes seemed impregnated with the odors of the

stable, of all kinds of grease and filth. The vices they had caught in listening to their masters had in them become still more debased, just as the remains of an orgy moulder away on the pantry shelves. Their mouths only uttered foul protestations and base accusations ; their talk was of revengeful anonymous letters, and their discussions of impudent ways of robbing, wasting, and pilfering, of brazen theories on theft, and of keeping accounts with four purses—the *silk stocking* purse, or the dripping perquisites ; the *sou in the franc* purse, or so much per cent. ; the *pickings* purse, or shopping gains ; and the *market penny* purse. This was followed by the ogress laugh of the Flemish woman, the chaff of the caddish groom, the slang of the maids, and the horrible language of the sick-nurse. Their voices, words, and mirth struck a chill ; it sounded like convicts making merry.

Gifted with a strong dose of stupidity, on which Paris life had made little impression, Philomène's aunt did not realize nor fathom the depravation of these vicious people. She laughed like the rest and with the rest, but her faithfulness, her natural honesty and thorough disinterestedness, made her listen

without comprehending, and she lived in the midst of this corruption not only without feeling tempted to imitate it, but unconscious of its existence. On the other hand, while Philomène was at first startled and instinctively alarmed, her very ignorance concealed from her the ugliest side of these folk. She heard much that she did not understand—words with double meaning that had no sense for her; phrases finished off by gestures, the indecency of which was unknown to her; shameless avowals that she listened to as mere inventions. At first, however, they had a certain respect for her candor and the innocence of her youth. In her presence the cynical speeches assumed a kind of reserve, and, moreover, in the porter's lodge everybody petted with coarse amiability the niece of Monsieur Henry's housekeeper. Indeed, the groom, who always heard his master talking of the practical side of life, had from the first gauged the position. From the outset he had reflected that Philomène's aunt was the old and valued servant of a bachelor; that if he married the niece—and he viewed his position of husband with much philosophy—and through his wife entered Monsieur Henry's establishment, he might

settle down in it, eventually replace the aunt, who was but mortal, and in good time become the real master of a house in which there was nothing to do and where the master was supposed to be an easy-going young man. Such was the plan he at once conceived, and he accordingly began paying his court to Philomène by offering her bunches of faded violets and launching coarse compliments at her, of a style that savored more of fisticuffs. At the groom's first attentions an insurmountable disgust took possession of Philomène and opened her eyes ; a sudden perception revealed to her in one instant the man and his associates, and now she drew back when they wished to embrace her. However, as she was too shy openly to show her feelings, the domestics set down her marked coolness toward the groom to mere school-girl whims.

Her aunt did not notice her revulsion of feeling and continued to drag her to these parties. One evening the groom—having been given a box at the Gaité by his master's mistress, who acted at that theatre—had invited both aunt and niece, and Philomène had to remain there for four hours side by side with the groom, to whom the obscurity

of the box lent confidence, while at every moment the Flemish cook, excited like all common people at a play, screamed out to her at the top of her voice : “ I say, my girl, you’re having fine fun ! ” For a moment Philomène hoped she would faint.

She continued to wait on Monsieur Henry at breakfast and Monsieur Henry always read his newspaper. Philomène longed for a word, a remark, a question ; she would even have been satisfied with the caress he mechanically bestowed on the old cat. She longed to sacrifice herself for the young man, whose image had remained united in her youthful imagination to all the fascinating domination of her childhood’s dreams. Had he been ill, she would willingly have spent nights nursing him ; had he suddenly lost all his money, she would have only been too happy to serve him for nothing. She thought of all kinds of misfortunes and catastrophes that might give her the opportunity of showing her affection and of making some return to the family to whom she owed all. A request for a plate, or a silver knife to peel a pear would rouse her painfully from these thoughts, in which she absorbed herself as in a golden dream, wishing almost that these misfortunes and catastrophes

would occur. Some days she could have implored Monsieur to scold her, to reproach her with some neglect, to show some displeasure—anything, indeed, if he would only have noticed her.

The coarseness of her surroundings and the indifference of her young master made the poor girl suffer cruelly. She felt ill and weary, and the whole atmosphere around her seemed either to smother her or to be a blank. The fact was that under the convent education her intelligence alone had remained that of the people, in keeping with her class in life, and in harmony with her future, while the rest of her faculties had been cultivated and raised to a high degree of sensitiveness. The religious education, with all its enervating culture, had refined all the aspirations of her mind, and by the spirituality of its nature borne the child far away from the instincts and morality of her equals, so that Philomène experienced in the sphere that was her own a jarring sensation of discomfort, the vague impression of a fall and exile. Life, which she now saw in all its crudity, wounded every feeling within her, and she could not accustom herself to its blows. The materialism of the passions, sentiments, and affections,

the brutality of the impressions, actions, and language natural to workingmen or servants, estranged her from the men, who inspired her with both fear and contempt. Neither did the women, on the other hand, attract her, and she did not feel any affinity with creatures who appeared so different from her and seemed, indeed, of a sex different from her own. Often in that low company tastes and cravings would impatiently arise within her ; she felt drawn toward a certain elegance, a certain amiability of intercourse, certain proprieties that she could not have defined, but of which, like a well-bred person, she felt the want. For what really affected her most painfully was not so much the ignorance of the servants, or their infamous and wicked natures, but the form in which this ignorance, infamy, and low nature was manifested. Their cynicism, which was new to her, pained her almost in a physical manner. And the young girl, who did not know much more than to read and write, who was totally deficient of mother wit, and whose brain was only filled with books of piety and a few simple novels, who by her intelligence was assuredly inferior to most of these men and women, actually compared herself in this

company to an unfortunate soul in purgatory, so much did she suffer from this suffering, which was one of instinct and sensation.

The young girl's heart was overflowing with tenderness, which met with no more response than her delicate attentions were welcomed with satisfaction. Her convent life had not only over-refined her soul, but had also ripened her heart in its hot-house atmosphere; and all that discipline and mortifications had suppressed of ardor in her nascent senses had only intensified the fervor of her amorous aspirations. Naturally affectionate, her heart was filled with tender yearnings by the voluptuous suavity of her religious books, by their ever-repeated imagery of perfumes and flowers—dews of May, celestial odors, fragrant roses and lilies ; it had softened in the church atmosphere, in the murmur of the orisons sweet as mystic kisses, under the penetrating gentleness of the confessor's voice, before the Sacred Heart, which the Sisters told her she must mentally bear like a flower on her bosom. It was a heart painfully attuned to love that she brought to confession—to the sacrament a heart ardently prepared for it. Love, love resounded all around her, and under the flame of this scorching word,

in her prostrations before the Spouse of her soul, the King of her love, the Beloved of her heart, in her aspirations toward Divine love, sweeter to her than honey, she had felt her heart dissolve in tenderness and swoon in the rapturous love that inspired Correggio and Saint François de Sales with a vision of the Virgin's death. Such was the heart the young girl had brought away with her from the convent, and it was with a terrible anguish she felt it overflow within her.

Philomène resigned herself to life, notwithstanding her sufferings ; but she carefully hid them, as a wounded man will with his hand compress and conceal his wound. Who could she confide in ? Her aunt would not have understood her ; moreover, she feared to profane her suffering by acknowledging it.

One evening that she had gone up to bed, Monsieur Henry, who was now in the habit of staying out all night, returned home. He was slightly intoxicated, and had, moreover, the cheerful expansion of a man who has copiously dined. He spoke loud, and in a thick voice, stammering out his words.

"I say, old girl," he said to the aunt, stretching himself in an arm-chair, "you

ought really to have had nephews—instead of nieces ! Young girls, do you see—young girls are not always convenient in a bachelor's house. Now, this evening—this evening I should—not have come home alone ; but what an infernal row there'd have been—about that child. You'd have been so cross—of course—I know girls must be respected—but it's an awful—awful bore. I say this—you know—not to make you send her away—eh ?—no—but—you told me one day that she loved that wretched groom. Well—let them marry—because, a married woman—a married woman—can hear and see anything—a married woman can—whereas your deuced niece——”

The sound of a fall, of a heavy thud like a bundle thrown down, was heard outside the door. It was Philomène, who, hearing the bell while she was yet on the back-stairs, and recognizing Monsieur Henry's ring, had come down-stairs again to bid him good-night ; she had let herself in with her latch-key, had stepped noiselessly along the passage, had listened, heard—and fainted dead away on the ground.

Her aunt and Monsieur Henry, who was sobered in an instant, dashed water in her

face and slapped the palms of her hands. When she came to herself she was writhing in a fit of hysterics and seated on an arm-chair Monsieur Henry had placed before the open window. A flood of tears relieved her, but she remained dazed and bewildered, not knowing why she was there nor the reason of her tears; and it was only when Monsieur Henry repeated several times that he had spoken heedlessly, that she should never be sent away, but should do exactly as she pleased, and made a thousand other soothing speeches, as if to a sick child, that she remembered what had taken place.

After this scene their usual life was resumed, as though nothing had occurred. Philomène seemed to have completely forgotten all and was totally unembarrassed. One morning, about three weeks afterward, as Monsieur Henry rose from breakfast, Philomène, addressing him for the first time without his first speaking to her, said, in a calm and steady voice he had never remarked before :

“Monsieur Henry, I want to ask your forgiveness—and to thank you for having been so kind to me—and your mother also. I shall never forget it.” And as Monsieur Henry

looked at her in astonishment, she lifted up her face :

“Will you kiss me, Monsieur Henry ? It will be good-by.”

And without giving him time to interrupt her, she added, with an effort and hurriedly, like some one summoning up all their courage:

“Yes ; I am going away. I leave on Monday to begin my novitiate at the Sisters of Saint Augustine ; but I shall always pray for you, Monsieur Henry, and for your happiness.”

Philomène spent two months of her probation in the Mother House of the Order of Saint Augustine, clothed in the black dress and little black cap of the postulants. At the end of these two months of exercises and religious training, of manual work in the house, the thorough earnestness of her vocation showed that she was worthy of beginning her novitiate. The *Veni Creator* was solemnly chanted for her by the community, and she appeared in church with the white muslin veil and blue sash that novices wear during the services.

Shortly after the *Veni Creator* she was permitted to take the habit. On this occasion she was dressed like a bride, in the wedding-

dress that had so long haunted her youthful dreams. A certain elegance and affected coquettishness, the innocent and last touch of coquetry for her sacrifice, was revealed in all her attire. She had assisted at high mass in the crowded chapel, the Superior on her right hand, and the Mistress of the Novices on her left, holding a lighted taper, emblem of the Divine light that illumined her soul.

After mass the officiating priest had said :
“What is your request?”

“I request admission into this Holy House, to serve God according to the rules prescribed by our holy founder, Saint Augustine.”

“Do you thoroughly know the rules?”

“Yes.” And Philomène had recited out loud the rules of the order.

“Do you promise to conform to them and obey them?”

“Yes, I promise so to do, by the grace of God.”

Then the priest had delivered a long exhortation on the sacrifices necessary in a religious life, on the advantages of such a life, on the dangers of the world, and the deceptions of those who seek for happiness in it, and, after having again asked Philomène if

she persisted in her intentions, the priest had cut off a lock of her hair, and she had left the chapel. When she returned there all her hair had been cut off, she was clothed in the costume of the order, each portion of which, one by one, had been blessed ; a thin woollen veil had replaced the muslin one, her face was swathed in white linen that half covered her forehead, and the ample, long woollen gown enveloped her in its heavy, straight folds.

Her name in religion had been already given her. She had been laid under the mortuary pall, and while the *De Profundis* had been sung over her, a prayer had risen from her heart—the prayer offered up while under the pall, which the nuns aver is always granted—a prayer imploring the grace and mercy of God for those who had succored and assisted her childhood.

Three months later, the novice—who had still seven months of novitiate before she could pronounce her vows—was sent to the hospital at * * *. She was about to replace a Sister carried off by typhoid fever ; and this Sister, whose death thus pointed out to Philomène the path of duty and charity, was her former friend, Céline, since then Sister Laurence.





III.

THE house-surgeons were gathered together in the resident's room.

It was a vaulted hall, and the stone walls were running down with the damp that oozed out of them. Opposite the gray door was a window that opened on to a yard two feet above the level of the floor. In the wall to the right of the door was a large cupboard used as a wardrobe and linen closet. To the left, over a copper fountain, hooked on to

the wall and capped by a towel, a great, black-painted set of pigeon-holes displayed pell-mell in its divisions bundles of paper, note-books, and old newspapers. Beyond this was a little white china stove, and an untidy, curtainless bed—the bed of the resident surgeon on duty at night. On the other side of the room was a great pipe-rack, and a big slate on which the house surgeons wrote down, in case they should be wanted, the name of the ward in which they would be found. A sheet of paper hung on a nail, adorned with a childish caricature of the governor of the hospital. On another nail was suspended another sheet of paper with a long list of names and ages marked in the margin—an alphabetical list of patients that a doctor, anxious to study diseases of the heart, had placed there, in order to be apprised of any deaths, and to be able to assist at the post-mortem examinations.

In this room were seven men, their heads covered with close skull-caps, seated round a table on which an old woman had just placed a smoking-hot leg of mutton. One only among them, the surgeon on duty for the day, had kept on his apron ; those belonging to the others were hung up on pegs, and to

the lapel of their coats were fixed little pin-cushions, covered with red or violet-headed pins, which had the effect of nosegays. They were talking.

“What ! you didn’t know what had become of poor Lemesle ? He is the medical adviser of the Rue Sainte-Marguerite-Saint-Antoine. . . . The wine-shop is his consulting room ; each consultation is chalked up on the wall, and each chalk-mark is worth a glass of spirits, and the pot-man rubs out the score according to his consumption.”

“Poor fellow !”

“So clever, too !”

“I say, Dubertrand, shall you go to the ball at Bicêtre to see the lunatics dance ?”

“At what time does it come off ?”

“In the afternoon.”

“Don’t go there . . . there’s no fun. . . . It’s like a ball of lawyers, . . . nothing characteristic about it.”

“There must, however, be some hysteric patients, and that might be amusing.”

“Amusing ! . . . No indeed ! One day, at a ball of that sort, we—that is, the governor, Chappe, and I—were completely hemmed in by the creatures, and could not get rid of them. . . .”

“Have you ever seen them act in theatricals, Noël?”

“No.”

“Now and again, when some epileptic makes too much ado, they seize him and turn him out. . . . I was with you, Pichenat, wasn’t I, when . . . ?”

“Yes, yes.”

“What’s the matter with you, Pichenat, this morning?”

“The matter! . . . Why, I had a scene this morning when the rounds were made. . . . I am furious. . . . You know my chief is very aggravating; he has only been appointed as a substitute, and you haven’t an idea what a plague he is! Luckily, he won’t be here more than a fortnight. . . . If he annoys me again to-morrow, I shall apply for leave. . . . He is really too trying! One day he will order ipecacuanha all round; the next day he will say: ‘No hurry, wait, let nature take its course! . . .’ The day after that it will be: ‘Gentlemen, a waiting policy is all very well for idle rich people, but have we any right to pursue that line here? Here is a cabinet-maker who has to gain his livelihood and wants to be at work again as soon as possible! . . .’ And thereupon ipeca-

cuanha is ordered all round the ward ! And so it goes on ! . . . What an idiot ! ”

“ Have you begun your lectures to the dressers yet, Noël ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ How many attend ? ”

“ About twenty.”

“ Haven’t you a fellow called Girardeau in your class ? ”

“ Yes, . . . and he does well. I believe we shall make something of him.”

“ He comes from my part of the world. I commend him to you. He is poor. They lost everything in ’48. . . . Besides that, his father is blind ; . . . he supports him.”

“ As he walks ? ”

“ No, no ; by giving lessons in music and spelling in the intervals of his medical studies. . . . ”

“ Monsieur Pichenat, you are wanted in the Sainte-Marthe ward,” said the old woman who waited on the surgeons.

“ Have you not got some numbers of the *Medical Gazette* at home ? ”

“ I believe I have some.”

“ You will bring them back, won’t you ? ”

“ Who is Number 47 ? ” inquired Pichenat as he reëntered the room.

— “How should I know? That’s rather good. . . . I can remember the patients by their illness, but not by their number.”

“Barnier, have you read Runeau’s work on the use of baths in the time of the Romans?”

“No, he has not sent it to me. . . . Is it a thick book?”

“A volume no thicker than my thumb. I have not cut it yet.”

“It may be interesting, . . . but he should have taken a wider view of the subject—made a philosophic and historic study of medicine generally. Why did he not seize upon the low morals of antiquity as a whole, the scandals of Greek and Roman society? . . . There was a subject for him! . . . And then his book would have been quite the fashion. . . .”

“What has become of Thierry?”

“I saw him to-day in the school of medicine. . . . He composed his essay in thirty hours!”

“You don’t say so!”

“He’s a wag, is Thierry. . . . One day he borrowed from me a superb tumor, on pretence of analyzing it with the aid of the microscope. As he is a better hand at the

microscope than I am, . . . and as I had no time . . . in short, I gave him all I had done, . . . and when I went to ask him for the analysis he told me he was going to use it himself, . . . that he had not finished ; . . . all kinds of excuses ! ”

“ Theft of a tumor ! The case is not provided for by law ! ”

“ There’s a knock at the door.”

“ Come in ! ”

A young man entered, with long hair falling over a red woollen comforter. He was a candidate for the fifth examination in medicine, and came to ask about the diseases of the various patients on whom he was to be interrogated. They replied :

“ Go up-stairs. . . . You will find some one about.”

When he had shut the door behind him :

“ There’s cool cheek, to come and ask us to do the examiners in that way, without even bringing a recommendation from any one ! ”

“ He’s as artful as a cochineal ! ”

“ Madame Bizet ! ”

The old woman came forward.

“ What’s this food ? Have you ever eaten human flesh ? ”

“ O monsieur ! ”

“ Well, Madame Bizet, this is precisely the same thing. . . . Do you think you have any clear idea, Madame Bizet, as to what may be the taste of human flesh ? ”

“ Lor' ! how dreadful ! . . . I don't know. . . . It must be like rabbit, I should think. ”

“ No, Madame Bizet, you are wrong ; it is a flavor between mutton and beef. I don't only speak from the accounts of travellers, you know, Madame Bizet. . . . One day a woman was brought here who had been trying to asphyxiate herself ; she had fallen on the brazier. Her arm was roasted . . . to a turn. If you could only cook your chops as well, Madame Bizet ! ”

“ Talking of chops, do you know that the commissariat actually refused one the other day to my chief for a patient ? ”

“ Disgusting, 'pon my word ! ”

“ And what did your chief say ? ”

“ Nothing. ”

“ He is generally down on them for things like that. ”

“ He simply gave the Sister ten francs (eight shillings) to buy chops for the patient. ”

“ Ah ! here comes the doctor ! ”

There was a shout from the whole party,

as a former student, who had just received his diploma, entered, carrying a bundle of his theses in blue paper covers under his arm.

“Have breakfast, eh?”

“Yes.”

“Madame Bizet, . . . a napkin.”

“Yes, sir.” And the old woman brought the doctor the napkin reserved for guests—a white pillow cover.

“Our warmest congratulations, old fellow.”

The doctor sat down, amid many handshakes, saying in a melancholy tone :

“Not that I am a bit cheerful, though !”

“How so?”

“To leave Paris. . . .”

“Where are you going?”

“I am going to practise at Péronne. . . .
Ah ! ugh ! a country town !”

And he began to eat mournfully.

“Ah ! I understand. Do you remember our first year at Bicêtre, eh, doctor? That was a fine time. What larks we had ! . . . Our rooms were over those of the retired list, who retire after thirty years’ service in the hospitals—*les reposants*, as they are called. . . . They did not rest much, I can tell you. We used to spend the night rolling logs in the passages. . . . Lorry made such an awful

row with his violin. . . . Then they were not particular as to the visits we received. . . . Just imagine, we used to make punch on the roof ! That was a game that used to send comets across the observatory telescopes. . . . And on the Bicêtre *fête* day—that was when we were at our best ! The Bicêtre fellows would not let us dance. . . . There were more than twenty of us. . . . The officers took our part. . . . What a row we did make. . . . It appears that it is all changed now. The students are watched, the *conciérge* has to make reports ; they are expected to behave like a parcel of school-girls, and not to snore at night ! ”

“ Do you remember, Barnier, that brute of a patient who threatened to thrash me when he got out ? ”

“ Yes ; because you kept him on low diet. . . . ”

“ Well, I met him the other day on the *Pont des Arts*. ”

“ Ah ? ”

“ Yes, and I had mended him too well, evidently, for he seemed as strong as a Turk. . . . I took the other side of the bridge. ”

There was a clear, sharp ring, and almost at

the same moment the shadow of a bier stopping before the window took away half the daylight from the room.

"Yes," said a house-surgeon to the doctor, "it is always at this hour and at this spot just as it was in your time, . . . cross-post for eternity!"

"Pass me the brandy."

"Which pipe will you have? Death's-head, or the lead-poisoned face?"

"No, the other."

There was a knock at the door.

"Come in!"

"Monsieur Pichenat," said a ward-maid, "it's for a woman you are wanted—a birth."

"Just one's luck! Something always turns up just as one has lighted a pipe."

"Grumble away! You would have had cause to do that if you had been in my place two years ago. . . . That was a hospital where one was kept going all day. And the nights! I calculated I was called up seven times on an average. . . . And then that confounded step of the attendant in the courtyard and coming up the stairs. Then in the morning at six o'clock a drumming at the door! Come in! A burial sheet to sign. When I think that it was an idiot of a

house-surgeon who gave the committee the idea of verifying a death ! What a notion ! . . . Patients who have been a couple of months dying in a ward. . . . Why, they have been dead long enough before any one notices it, only they obstinately continue to breathe ! . . .”

“Are the operations satisfactory just now ?” asked the doctor.

“So-so !”

“No, for some time past they have not done well.”

“There is sometimes a run of bad luck. . . .”

“And what is annoying about it is that it does not depend upon the surgeon. The operation may be perfectly well done ; it is a bit of bad luck, like a hand at lansquenet. . . . One passes or not. . . . Positively, it is a toss-up. . . .”

“Yes, it is a chance. . . . For instance, last year my chief fell ill ; . . . he had just done five-and-twenty operations, one after another, without a single drawback, and very serious operations, mind you. Harder was sent to replace him. . . . You know Harder is every bit as good. Well, he did five operations ; all died ! When it came to the sixth,

he put his instruments in his pocket and left and did not return."

"He was quite right, to my mind."

"They are not as unlucky here as in the hospital I have just come from. For the last two years they have lost every case. . . . It was no joke at last. At one time, on the men's side, there was purulent infection on the third floor, lockjaw on the second, and hospital pyæmia on the first. . . ."

"Well done !"

"What is curious is that they lose many more in Paris than in the provinces, . . . where they are often famously hacked about."

"Come, come, there are very good surgeons in the provinces ; one must not confound them all in one condemnation."

Pichenat, who had returned, had seated himself in the principal arm-chair, and amused himself by teasing his neighbor with one of the peeled sticks which the students used as fencing sticks. Suddenly this neighbor sprang from his chair upon the table.

"What is the matter with you, Malivoire ? Why are you figuring away on the table ?"

"No ; I have only got onto the *rostrum*," gravely replied the young surgeon answering

to the name of Malivoire, " for the discussion of the budget. Gentlemen, there was a time, I should say a Golden Age, when the administrative power made it their chief delight to feed us well. And such was the generosity of the committee in those days, according to the traditions that have been handed down to us, that a surgeon might have started an eating-house with what the committee provided for him. Obligated now to find our own food, we chose from amongst us a treasurer who seemed worthy of our confidence. . . ."

"Now hear me!" cried Pichenat.

"It is to the conduct of this responsible individual, in whom we placed entire confidence, and who shamefully pockets perquisites, . . ."

"Hear, hear!"

". . . that I wish to call your attention. Pichenat—I name him, gentlemen—is always taking cabs; it is true, he allows me to share them, but he pays for them. I saw him to-day holding a confab with his bootmaker, and paying his bill! . . ."

"Quite the contrary," said Pichenat.

"Gentlemen, he talks of taking a box at the Opera. . . . One word, gentlemen, in conclusion. At Bicêtre we lived for twenty-

five francs a month; Pichenat dares to ask us eighty."

"Why did you appoint me treasurer?"

"So that you should treasure up, to be sure."

"Malivoire, you are kicking over my brandied coffee!"

"Down with you, Malivoire!"

"Is there any ink here? . . . and a pen of any kind?" asked the doctor. And he began to write at the end of the table dedications on copies of his essay. "By the way, does any one want a well-prepared heart? Who would like to have it?"

"It would suit me; I'll take it."

"You have a fresh novice in the Sainte-Thérèse ward?"

"Haven't you seen her?"

"No, and don't care to. At the hospital I was in last year they had the Sisters of Sainte-Marthe."

"Ah! to be sure—Jansenist Sisters."

"Don't talk to me about your Jansenist Sisters! They are all marked with small-pox."

"And the youngest knew our professors when they were students."

"What is the name of our novice? They

have names ; I don't know where they fish them up from. . . ."

"Is not her name Sister Ambrosine?"

"No, Sister Philomène."

"She is very pretty."

"And, besides, she seems a good sort of creature. . . . She does not pull a face as long as your arm. . . ."

"The nose in that face might, however, be smaller with advantage. . . ."

"Yes ; but she has blue eyes and a soft glance."

"Is it a *z* or an *r* at the end of Métivier?" inquired the doctor, still writing.

"A *z*."

"The best of her is that she is graceful. . . . She does not move awkwardly. . . ."

"As for me, I don't know what she has or she has not, but she seems to me charming. What do you say about her, Barnier?"

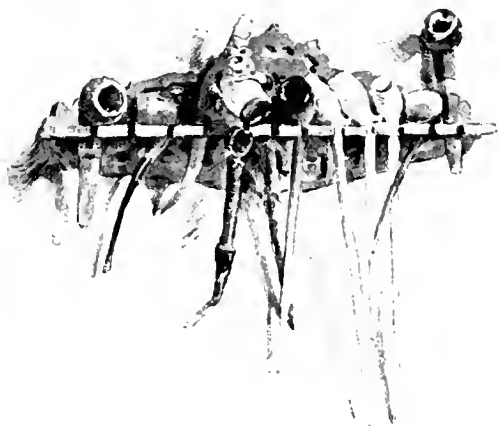
"Ah ! to be sure, she is in the Sainte-Thérèse ward ; it is Barnier she works under. Well, Barnier?"

"My dear fellow, as to me, . . . what would you have me say? . . . I do not like these young Sisters on principle. I have a horror of romance. . . . I hate little girls who take it into their heads to become

nuns, without knowing why or wherefore . . . just a romantic idea, just as they might take a fancy to some cousin who came home for the vacation. . . . The old ones, whose heart and hand do not tremble—they are the right sort.”

“But come, old fellow, they must make a beginning.”

“True, but I can’t help feeling so. Only yesterday evening she wanted to help me with a dressing. I was afraid she might turn faint, as she did the other day, and I could not refrain from snubbing her.”





IV.

SISTER PHILOMÈNE had entered on her hospital work with a feeling of the deepest emotion. She had thought and pondered over it, hoping to become familiarized with the idea ; but it had, nevertheless, haunted and filled her soul with terror. Day by day she felt weaker and less able to struggle against her apprehensions, against the poignant im-

ages conjured up by the mere sight of a great hospital wall pierced with its small windows. Her imagination, working in the dark, exaggerated the horrors concealed behind. She anticipated something like the colored anatomical plates she had as a child caught sight of somewhere in the students' Quartier Latin. And the very vagueness of it all created for her a hideous fiction.

Her temples throbbed and her cheeks flushed when for the first time she entered the ward confided to her charge. The very pokers she saw on the stoves she took for cauterizing irons. She fancied she was going to see morsels of flesh, hideous stains on sharp steel instruments—all the dread paraphernalia of surgery at its horrible work.

Instead of these horrors, she saw rows of white beds, white curtains—white linen everywhere—the pleasing air of fresh cleanliness of a young girl's bedroom. The polished floors shone. The patients rested peacefully on their pillows. The rosy tint of a fine autumn day lit up the transparent whiteness of the beds. Streaks of light played upon the bright copper dishes and the tin cans and basins, and the laughter of the house surgeons,

the murmur of the convalescents' chatter gave everywhere a note of youth and cheerfulness. The whole ward was pervaded with so much brightness, peace, and order; so clever a veil was thrown over the misery and filth of disease, over the martyrdom of the wretched sufferers; horror was so well clothed, suffering was so calm, and agony so noiseless, that the Sister, to her surprise, was calmed and reassured by the reality she dreaded. She was not only relieved, but filled with confidence and joy, freed at last from the terrors of her imagination, and proud to feel stronger than she had ever hoped to be.

She dreaded above all the sight of death, and she now found herself in presence of it. A man had just died, his stretched-out hands lay flat on the bed. A brown knitted vest barely covered his chest; his body was raised on a couple of pillows; his head, thrown back and slightly turned on one side, displayed a thick black beard, pinched nostrils, and hollowed eyes. His hair clung moist and damp round his head, and his mouth was wide open, as though departing life had forced the lips apart in the last supreme expiration. He lay there, still warm, yet wrapped and stiffened in

the invisible shroud of death. The Sister remained a long time gazing at him, till she felt no more emotion before the corpse than would have stirred her at the sight of a waxen figure.

For several days she maintained this firm courage, and it was with surprise and satisfaction that she ascertained how easily she overcame the weakness and cowardice of her nature. She had begun to think herself properly inured when, one evening, looking at the wan, pallid face of a sleeping patient, her heart failed her, and she had to catch hold of the bed-post to avoid falling. Until then, by her power of will and by diligent absorption in her duties, she had escaped the impression and shock of all she saw around her. But the time had come when all this emotion unwittingly accumulated within her must burst forth, and she broke down under the strain of the constant shocks that had passed unheeded at the time. Her nerves, wrung by the spectacle of the hospital ever before her eyes, became unstrung, fevered, and irritated, and noises—such, even, as a tin cup falling—would send a painful thrill through every fibre.

Every day revealed to her more vividly the

things that the hospital conceals so admirably from view at first sight. The students' heads bending over a sick-bed were not so close together that her eye could not glance between them and catch sight of some raw, bleeding wound. Death at all hours crossed her path, in that ghastly brown box that hid the corpse, adding a mysterious terror to the horror of death. Things of which the meaning at first escaped her now assumed a new significance as she passed them. Mere sights called up some painful recollection that frightened her, some image that pained her, saturated as they were with the sufferings she had tended; and when she beheld the wooden stretcher standing empty in the ante-room, her fancy peopled it again with the pale women carried off upon it to the operating room, and brought back paler still. Her very marrow was chilled and her legs trembled under her at the images thus evoked.

At the top of the wide stairs she so often went up and down on her way to the Sainte-Thérèse ward there was a big landing, and on that landing a wall that she had to pass. When her gown brushed against it, she was seized with terror, like a child in the dark. Nevertheless, it was a wall like any other, a wall

devoid even of those dark stains to be seen on many another hospital wall, that a bloody hand leaves on its passage--but behind it the Sister right well knew was the dissecting-room.





V.

THE hospital, the wards, the beds soon became for her like that wall : what her eyes saw not her mind seemed to see. Her imagination carried her behind every curtain, near each suffering bed ; it was, indeed, a kind of abominable second sight that nothing could arrest. Often under the harrowing torture of these ceaseless perceptions tears rose to her eyes, tears that she repressed at the moment, but which welled up again a minute later. Everyday scenes, the most ordinary incidents of hospital life, sounds and sights that had nothing dramatic about them, threw her suddenly into a half-fainting condition. A trifle was enough to bring tears to her eyes and make her falter in this ultra-sensitive state.

Utterly discouraged and unable to restrain her feelings, it was as the last drop that makes the vase overflow.

She was as much worn out by these emotions as a gambler by a long night of play. It seemed to her that her very reasoning gave way, and her physical power was so crushed down that there were moments when she could have screamed out, "*Enough, enough for to-day!*" But she immediately walked, and moved about; bestirring herself unnecessarily, fulfilling some duty she need not have performed; and thus reconquering possession of her senses, compelled them to obey and serve her.

In the evening, when not on duty as night nurse at the hospital, she returned to the community with her mind a blank, incapable of thought or energy. She could hardly follow the meaning of her prayers, or even remember the familiar words. The only ideas that came to her mind were mechanical—a wearisome repetition of her physical impressions. They were not recollections but images that passed before her, to which she abandoned herself in a passive contemplation; images which, by a strange illusion, mercilessly brought before her eyes the living reality. In

vain she prayed in order to forget ; but the odor, the insupportable odor, that clung to her clothes and the very pores of her skin, would not be forgotten. The hospital was no longer a vision ; she was in it once more.

Long did she maintain the struggle, trying to overcome her repugnances, offering her sufferings to God, and imploring him to grant her the courage to be faithful in perseverance.





VI.

THERE is a certain hour in the morning—about ten o'clock—when the movement caused by the attendants, the animation of the patients, throws into a hospital a certain brightness, almost gayety. It is like a sort of respite in the day's suffering. The doctor's rounds and the dressing of wounds are over ; the approach of the doctor has brought a little hope to each bed ; the skilful hand of the house-surgeon has brought to the sufferer the relief of a fresh bandage and ointment. Bodies as well as hearts have been comforted. The stained linen has been carried off in a

great sheet by the under-nurse ; the floors have been polished, the pillows shaken up ; the heads lie restfully ; the faces, peaceful, smiling, and half resuscitated, wear an expression of calm hopefulness, and even some touch of dainty cheerfulness. At the head of the beds the most convalescent of the patients are dressing, seated sideways on their chairs, half turning toward the windows, happy and tired at first getting up, slowly lingering over their toilet, absent-minded and gazing vacantly around them.

Then the large basket full of golden loaves cut up in four pieces makes its appearance, and the little truck with the breakfast for the ward laid out on a white napkin.

First Sister Philomène distributed the broth. Quickly, with rapid steps, she went from one bed to the other, bearing in front of her the tin bowl, the fumes of which smoked in her face. In a second she was at the head of the bed by the side of the patient. To some she handed the bowl of broth ; others she fed herself, supporting them while they raised themselves laboriously to drink while she held the bowl to their trembling lips. After the broth came the bread, which she distributed more rapidly, hurrying along with

a vivacity which sent her veil flying behind her and her dress flapping against the curtains ; swiftly she passed—now at one bed, now at another. A convalescent patient, dressed in the gray hospital gown, followed her, carrying the loaves in a great linen table-cloth, which was tied round her neck while she held out one end. At each bed she opened the cloth to the Sister, who took the piece of bread for the patient and placed it at the foot of the bed on the counterpane. Then came the wine, which another convalescent patient handed to her in a wooden pail ; at each bed the Sister plunged a small measure in the pail, and once, twice, or thrice poured it into a mug, consulting all the while a sheet of paper pinned to her sleeve, on which were written the portions for each patient. To the very end of the ward the clink of the metal followed her steps as she replaced the mug on each table.

After the wine, the Sister busied herself distributing to those who were not yet well enough to be put on ordinary fare the more delicate food provided for them : chicken, chops, and jam. The under-nurse, or some invalid patient able to get about, assisted her in this service ; and she herself pushed and

dragged along the little rolling truck that carried to the foot of the beds, but only stopped at a few, the great saucepan full of rice milk, the earthen dish of stewed plums, the tiny portions of boiled meat on the big tin dish.



The whole time the distribution was taking place, Philomène was animated with joyous activity. Some winged force seemed to endow her with graceful sprightliness; and she, beautiful in the very kindness of her heart,

with her sleeves tucked up to free her white hands, went to and fro, softly joked about the patients' appetites, laughed at their hunger, promised this one to recommend her for an extra portion ; that one, if she was very good, to give her some tid-bit the next day, thinking of everything, and sweeping off with her fingers as she talked any crumbs of bread that had slipped between the sheets.

This was indeed for Sister Philomène the happiest hour of the day. She forgot herself, she acquired fresh strength in the pleasure and joy of this sweet fatigue. She found in this duty the forgetfulness of all that was ugly, repugnant, and terrible around her. And this morning's work so filled her heart that she often gained in it sufficient courage for the remainder of the day.





VII.

To add to the strength she derived from the pleasantness of her morning's work she soon discovered other and purer sources of strength, ever abundantly and providentially renewed by the graces inherent in the work itself. These were nothing more than a blessed illusion of her own heart—the illusion that sustains in the beginning of a hospital's repugnant novitiate both house-surgeons and Sisters. The Sister had faith in her power against death, in her power to do a great deal for the health of her patients; she had the credulous and generous confidence, the grand intoxication of charity, that God gives to all

who approach disease, to enable them to attain without faltering the force acquired by habit. Sister Philomène firmly believed that suffering could not resist her care, her vigilance, her ceaseless attentions, the effort of her every thought, the will of her whole being. She hoped to perform miracles, by giving her life to the sick, watching even their sleep, calling the attention of house-surgeon and doctor to the most incidental detail of their disease, testing the medicines and distributing them herself ; in a word, making their recovery the one thought and occupation of every moment of her time. She fancied also she could wrest them from suffering by her watchful tenderness ; she should console and smile on them, snatch them from despair, raise them up to hope ; she should be a sister at their bedside, a mother at the lonely death-bed of the homeless and forsaken ; death should be powerless to snatch the living from her protecting arms.

Alas ! time and reality were to show her the vanity of her dream. The Sister found that the limits of life and death were beyond human power. She saw that the supreme hour was inexorable, and that neither prayer nor watchfulness had power to force or pro-

pitiating Nature. And though her work of devotion was not diminished in her eyes, yet her mission appeared to her far more humble and modest, limited to the mere alleviation of human suffering. Moreover, when the disappointment came, when the truth became known to her after months of anxiety and struggle, the process of inurement was accomplished ; she no longer needed the support of an illusion to tread firmly the path of duty which she had traced out for herself. The ardor, the impulsiveness, the nervous irritability of her sensitive nature had been used up in the zeal of her first efforts. Disease and death had now become habitual ; they could no longer make her eye shrink or her hand falter. All that remained in her of woman she felt was vanquished and subdued by the Sister of Charity ; and, clothed in strength with her nun's dress as with an armor, she threw herself on her knees in the little glazed cell at the end of the ward, where she remained when not wanted, and thanked God in a burst of joy.

From this moment she was possessed of a firm serenity which habit could not harden. Her unalterable gentleness never became indifferent ; it remained tender. Her patients

delighted in her attendance because her face always wore an expression of interest and real compassion for them. They loved her for the look she gave them, for the voice that spoke so softly. They loved her because a tremor of emotion still lingered in the care she bestowed on them.



VIII.

“WHAT ! had you really such difficulty in getting accustomed to hospital work ? You, a surgeon—a man ?”

“Yes, indeed ; people fancy that it costs us nothing. Well, you will hardly believe it, Sister—and I am not the only one—for more than a year after I began hospital work I was depressed and saddened, dreadfully saddened, by all I saw ; and it was quite six months before I could eat my dinner in comfort.”

“ Ah ! I am glad to hear you say that. I felt so ashamed of myself at first.”

“ And then it is much worse for us than for you. The first experience in the dissecting-room is awfully trying. It gives one such a turn. And the post-mortem examinations ! The loathsome, disgusting smell that clings to one—fortunately, there is plenty of mustard-seed to wash with. Oh ! it is hard work at first, for every one. This morning, for instance, we had such a scene. As we had made rather a row the other day in the Lecture Hall, we fancied a spy had slipped in during the doctor’s rounds, a very dapper, neat young fellow, with a little black mustache. So we pushed him up against a bed in which there was a small-pox patient—and down he fainted. We at once cried out : ‘ That’s one of them.’ ”

The house-surgeon, Barnier, who attended to the Sainte-Thérèse ward, was talking with Sister Philomène. The Sister listened and watched him as he stood in the shadow of the open door, leaning against the wall. She stood in the middle of his study like a luminous figure ; a flood of light came through the big window and cast a dazzling sheen over her white costume. From all sides of the

room, through the window-panes and curtains, the sun poured in upon her and bathed her in its rays ; and in the brilliancy that surrounded and spread over her, her face, softened by the transparency of her coif and veil, seemed encircled with a shining halo. Her complexion had the transfigured pallor that the cloister life often gives to nuns, the divine and virginal light that brings to mind the glory of a resuscitated being ; and her countenance was radiant with spiritual beauty.

“ You lend me courage,” she went on after a moment’s silence ; and rousing herself from her thoughts, she added : “ Ah ! you are looking at the book I am reading—I wanted to ask you about it. There are many things you must explain to me. . . .”

“ Very well, Sister ; it is the *Manual*, I see. I am quite at your service.”

“ The fact is, I want to know—one ought to learn a little about medicines if one wants to be of use. Oh ! I don’t intend to be turned away again like that other day—you remember—when you took the bandage out of my hands.”

“ Was I really so rough ? ”

“ Why do you ask ? ”

“Because I see you are still vexed with me.”

“No, I am not, or I should not speak about it. You were nervous on my account, I know. But now I am brave ; I have prayed so ardently that strength has been given me. Put me to the test and you will see.”





IX.

THIS great victory, this mastery over herself, was not at first absolute, nor without relapse. From time to time she was again surprised by the instinctive feelings, and the shock of impressions she fancied she had freed herself from, and she still experienced

some final emotions that gave her a parting pang.

One morning, as she went down to the linen-closet, she saw the house-surgeon enter the consulting-room, and, remembering that she wanted to ask him what dose of quinine she must give a patient, she thought she would go and inquire at once, instead of sending for him. She therefore crossed the snow-covered court-yard, following the black track of footsteps by the side of the half-thawed gutter—a narrow pathway that led to the steps of the room—and she entered the surgery.

In the raw light of the curtainless window, over the wooden barrier placed to divide the files of out-patients, an old man was at that moment exhibiting to the surgeon a large swelling on his miserably emaciated wrist. He was a poor, little old man, shrivelled up by the cold, in a threadbare coat with its collar turned up. A few long, straggling white hairs clung to his bony face, and his sunken eyes seemed lifeless. He stood there, bent and humble, holding his hat in his shaking hand. He himself shook like some old dead tree tottering under a wintry blast. Barnier looked at the sick man's wrist.

"Do you cough?" he inquired, without raising his eyes.

"Yes, sir, a great deal," answered the old man in a voice scarcely audible, so faint and doleful was it, "but it's my wrist that pains me."

"Yes—I see—but we cannot take you in. You must go to the parvis Notre Dame."

The old man did not reply, but merely gazed at the surgeon. "And ask for some physic—not any operation, only physic," the surgeon repeated, as the man seemed not to hear.

"But it's here it hurts," persisted the old man in his dull, feeble voice, still displaying his wrist.

"They will cure you of that, do you understand, in curing your cough."

"To the parvis Notre Dame," shouted almost in the old man's ear a gruff voice from between a thick pair of mustaches, those of the hospital porter, who stood with his hands behind his back, swelling his voice so as not to give way to emotion. The snow was falling fast and its heavy flakes could be seen through the window. The old man went off without a word, with his hat still trembling in his shaky hand.

"Poor devil! what weather! And it's a

good distance," said the porter, looking at the snow. "He will not probably live five days."

The surgeon had turned to a young man near him : "Yes," he said, "it is a hard case. But if I had admitted him, my chief would have sent him away to-morrow ; it is very difficult to know what to do with such poor creatures ; it is what we call in hospital slang *une patraque*.^{*} If we admitted all those who are consumptive—Paris wears out so many !—we should have no room for the others, those that can be cured." And, seeing the Sister waiting to speak to him, "Do you want anything, Sister ?"

"I can't remember," stammered the Sister, and she hurried away.

^{*} Broken down.



X.

“MADAME NUMBER ONE !”

“Madame Number Six !”

“Madame Number Eleven ! Just listen
for a moment.”

The patients in Sainte-Thérèse ward were

calling each other by the numbers of their beds, talking and gossiping from one bed to another. Almost all were in bed ; only seven or eight, who were getting up for the first time, were seated on chairs by their bedside. Some were slowly pacing up and down the ward. One of them, sitting at the end of the big table, was writing under the dictation of another, with elbows outstretched and body bent in her unaccustomed effort. The house-surgeon was finishing his afternoon rounds.

And from one bed to the other they exchanged questions.

“ Do you expect anybody to-morrow ? ”

“ To-morrow—ah ! yes, Thursday—I don’t know.”

“ I expect three visitors—no, four,” said a woman, counting on her fingers. “ You did not see my husband last time, did you ? ”

“ Yes, I saw him ; do you think I could sleep with such a weight as this on my body ? ”

“ And you ? ”

“ Oh ! as for me, my husband and children would have to travel two hundred miles——”

“ What, you live so far off ? ”

“ Yes, indeed, thank God, I don’t belong to your Paris ! If I was the only person to live

in it, it would be empty enough. Not even a tree before the churches ! For those who have their relations here it's all very well, but for the others, they've only the hospital ; and they are cheerful places ! Ain't it ugly here ? I am sure I shall be quite melancholy for a fortnight after I have got home."

" Is it a pretty country where you live ? "

" I should think it was. Suppose this is the principal street. Well, we live there. You enter into the best room. Oh ! what work I shall have to clean it all up ! You know what men are. And then there are two rooms at the back, and the garden. On the left hand in the garden is the shed where the father and lads work at their knives. They do cutlery work, and of the best, which they sell to a shop in the Rue Richelieu ; they work like niggers ! Well, there's the garden, in which we have a winter pear-tree so loaded with fruit that a lot are lost ; then, at the further end, the river runs by—such clear water ! So that one has only a few steps to go to wash one's linen."

" I say, Madame Number Nine, were you already in the hospital when that rag-picker's wife was here ? "

" No."

“Well, fancy ; the poor thing’s agony began Sunday morning ; her husband came to see her in the afternoon—a horrid man, who spent his days drinking, and had drank her out of house and home. She had saved a little money that she had tied up in her shift. That blackguard, under pretence of kissing her, tried to get hold of it. She called out, ‘Thief, thief!’ It made such a commotion in the ward.”

The surgeon had reached the last beds. As he passed by one of them he gently scratched the counterpane at the foot of it.

“I am no longer ticklish, Monsieur Barnier,” said almost gayly the woman who had had her leg cut off, and, after a moment’s silence, she added, answering a neighbor :

“It is a fact there are bad men, but there are also good men. There’s Monsieur Barnier, for instance, who is so gentle and so kind to the sick. Has not the half-hour struck yet ? I wonder if the Sister is not going to make her orange round to-day. It would refresh me a bit.”

“The Sister ? Yes, there she is—she is coming out of her box.”

Sister Philomène had just come out of her den ; she was peeling an orange as she walked

along, holding it out at arm's length so as not to stain her dress. When she had taken off the peel she slowly divided it, and, going up to the bedsides, distributed the transparent pieces into the open mouths of the women, eager as little children. At the mention of Barnier's name his praises rang through the ward. Gratitude and blessings were loud-spoken.

"Yes," said one, "a kind, good fellow, who shows no reluctance about his work. . . ."

"Ah ! indeed he knows how to dress wounds ! And he uses warm water first, so that it does not hurt at all."

"He came to our place to doctor my man, and certainly it was not for what we could pay him."

All these voices reëchoing his praises sounded softly in Sister Philomène's ears. Her step was not slower, but she felt an involuntary sympathy for the women who spoke like this—almost, indeed, a kind of gratitude.

"Here are my paper bags finished. I hope they'll be pleased with them in the dispensary !" said a woman sitting up in bed to one lying down, with a big cat snoozing quietly at her feet. "Ah ! to-morrow—to-morrow !" and she again repeated "to-morrow" in a

humming voice. "I shall try to have my certificate to-day so as to get out early to-morrow and see again my little home. How happy I am ! When your turn comes, my dear, you'll see ; however weak your legs are, they feel quite strong enough to take you off home ! Still, it is hard to leave one's companions. We ought all to go out the same day."

"Oh ! as for me, I don't mind staying behind ; I don't suffer any more now. And, you see, it's everything not to suffer, when one has had such awful pain as I have. And then I got a woman I know to tell my fortune in coffee-grounds, and she saw me all right again on my two legs in a few months—and it's a woman who has foretold me everything that has happened. I can still work, that is something ; one need never be dull."

"That's very fine, I say, that embroidery of yours ; for some princess, eh ?"

"I'll tell you," said the invalid, after looking to see if Sister Philomène was near. "It's for a present—to trim a petticoat. As I've been here six months and Monsieur Barrier has nursed me so well, I thought I'd just offer him a little remembrance. He is too nice a young man not to have a sweet-

heart, and this will trim up a petticoat for her ; it will look pretty in dancing—”

“ Will you stop talking ? You will be having fever here,” said Sister Philomène almost sternly, coming back on her steps.





XI.

So many things, so many duties, so much responsibility is left, by the hospital regulations, to the discretion, good will, and zeal of the Sisters that the Sister who has charge of a ward is either all-powerful or a nonentity. She is a nonentity if she lack intuition and energy ; if she lack the spirit and youthful enthusiasm of self-devotion. However commendable she may be by her piety and meritorious qualities, she is nothing if she have not the true vocation that instinctively teaches her how to devote herself both hand and soul to the task of alleviating pain, that fever of charity which is a divine anxiety of

mind and body. She is nothing if she possess not a certain delicacy of feeling which enables her to ease the hearts of those who suffer ; if she be deficient in a certain maternal authority by which she enters into the wants, ideas, and confidence of the man or woman of the people. Or if, again, she be not endowed with the natural gifts that predestine her for her part, if she be wanting in health or physical strength, or if her face be not one of those amiable, smiling countenances that the sick like to see at their bedside—then the Sister is nothing more than an under nurse, more gentle than other underlings. If, however, the Sister has some of these qualities, if she is active and sympathetic, ever eager in her work ; if she widens, according to the capacity of her heart, the narrow circle of her occupations ; if she strives to make her task as noble as her sacrifice—in fine, if she is really a Sister of Charity—she is everything, does everything, and is all-powerful in the ward.

The Sisters' absolute duties consist in receiving, verifying, and administering the medicines brought by the dispensary assistant ; in distributing the food, more especially the wine, and in seeing that it shall

not be drunk by the attendants or ward-maids; in giving out the linen, sharing with the underlings the nursing duties—in fact, exercising a general supervision over the ward. But these duties, vague and extensible by the very dryness and narrowness of their terms, place in her hands, if she chooses to use them freely, the governing power of the ward. Thus, with the distribution of the food and wine, there are also the grants of tickets for extra wine, fish, or jam, delicacies given to the convalescents and to tempt the invalids' returning appetites, which the Sister can always obtain from the doctor if she knows how to ask. Her strict duties are confined to the administering of the physic and nursing the sick, but she is free to be something more than a nurse. By patiently and carefully scrutinizing the patient, by experience and an elementary study of medicine, she can assist the doctor's observations, send in time for the house-surgeon, tend the patient with a certain knowledge of his illness. Besides the management of the ward, a control confined to a mere supervision of its cleanliness and order, she has also, if she chooses, a moral control to exercise. Is it not her duty to note down the convalescents

who trade with their bread, to listen to the invalids' complaints, to see that these complaints reach the officers, to denounce and obtain the dismissal of any attendants or under-nurses who exact remuneration for attentions they are bound to bestow ?

And, over and above these functions and this influence, is it not the Sister's duty and in her power to console the sick ? She has charge of these suffering beings ; she must bring hope to these transient but ever-filled sick-beds, wherein the dead have scarcely time to grow cold !

And what part is there more grand, more noble, than this : to bring back the sick to God, to veil from them their empty, poverty-stricken hearts ; to point out a future to this one, heaven to another ; to join two prayerful hands over those for whom no one prays ; to wrest those about to die from the horrible dreams of the dissecting-room, to lull them to sleep in God's arms ?

In the ward where she had been placed under the direction of an estimable and devoted Mother, whose zeal, however, was somewhat cooled and tempered by habit and old age, the young woman won both doctor and students by the warmth of her zeal, and soon

rose and attained the fullest authority of a hospital Sister. Free and mistress of her own actions under this superior devoid of jealousy, and happy to have her duties lightened, she daily extended and increased her power of kindness and her compassionate influence.

She was the mediatrix through whom all that was hard in the hospital rule was softened; hers the gentle and compassionate hand the sufferers craved for, the soothing, happy voice that lent courage to the convalescents. She was the watchful and controlling power who enforced a humane and conscientious service round the sick-beds. She was almost a family for the sick, so well did she enter into their affections as a confidante, share their thoughts as a relative, their tears like a friend. She could be seen constantly passing from bed to bed, never empty-handed, a tender glance in her eyes; going to and fro, from the dispensary to the ward, from the ward to her little room, counting, checking, verifying, bending over the consulting-books, never taking a moment's rest. Her gown flitted backwards and forwards, ever on the move.

She was indeed venerated and beloved.

The patients who had been in the ward for some time talked to the new-comers of their good luck and the kind Sister who would attend to them. Even in the other wards they looked out for the nights she would be on duty ; in the evening, from one bed to another, they spoke of her rounds ; and when in the daytime she came down the stairs, the convalescents, who on the men's landing smoked their pipes as they hobbled about on crutches, saluted her with a pull at their cotton nightcaps. Her reputation was a kind of popularity. Her name was frequently mentioned at the students' dinners ; some spoke enthusiastically of her charming manners ; in others curiosity was excited ; at the bottom of their hearts, doctors and students alike took a certain pride in this admirable Sister, the novice of Sainte-Thérèse ward.



XII.

WHEN in the hospital the patient—man or woman—is not a brutish creature, a kind of animal whom poverty has hardened and filled with enmity ; when he shows some of the feelings of human nature, and under the hand that tends him reveals some moral sentiments ; when his heart has received even the slightest education, he at once finds the doctors and students full of kindly attention.

The Sisters, too, obey the irresistible law of sympathy. They are involuntarily attracted where their tenderness will meet with the best reward, and where also they may hope, in their pious zeal, to find the greatest facility in propagating their religious ideas, and sowing thoughts of God in a soul.

This affection for grateful and favorite patients sustained Sister Philomène's courage ; it made her strong and patient. Often she reproached herself for it ; she fancied, in her hours of stern self-examination, that her preferences were unjust ; but as she felt no remorse, she concluded that God did not demand this sacrifice of her.

Was not her whole life made up of those affections created by her self-devotion, formed by the bedside of the patients, and too often broken by death—abrupt separations that made her so sad ? Was it not all her consolation, her love for these women whom she saw, after many long days and much suffering, start off one morning with the joyousness of renewed health, turn the handle of the door, and disappear, leaving with her a feeling of intense happiness, but also the pang of parting ?

Amongst her patients Sister Philomène had

a young woman whom they had at first hoped to cure, and whose life was now despaired of. In her speech and attitude this woman—entered on the books as a seamstress, and who never spoke of her past—betrayed early traces of education, of fortune, and of a once happy life. A catastrophe could be suspected—one of those misfortunes that oblige unaccustomed hands to work. The emotion of her thanks, her deep and subdued despair, and her resignation had interested every one, the surgeon, the students, and the other patients. Every day—taking advantage of the permission granted to the patients' sons and daughters, a little boy, whom they soon found out lived in a common lodging-house in the Rue de l'Hôtel-de-Ville, came and sat by the poor woman's bedside, and called her mother. He was dressed in the old clothes of a better class, which he seemed to have grown up in, and grown out of. He sat on a tall chair, dangling his legs, with the unhappy expression of a child longing to cry, looking at his mother, who, too weak to talk to him, devoured him with her eyes for a full hour, and then dismissed him.

Sister Philomène took a fancy to the child; every day she had some fruit or tit-bit put

aside for him as a surprise. She led him by the hand to her little room, and there talked to him, showed him religious picture-books, or gave him a pencil and, seating him at her desk, let him scribble on blank tickets. Sometimes she would wash his face, part his hair, and bring him back clean and tidily combed to the sick-bed of his mother, who blessed her with a look such as she would have bestowed on the Holy Virgin if she had appeared to her holding her son's hand.

The woman was fading away. One day the child was seated by her side on a chair. He gazed at her almost terrified, seeking in vain his mother in the face he no longer recognized. The Sister tried in vain to amuse and coax him. At the foot of the bed Barnier was putting mustard-plasters on the patient's legs. And the woman, turned toward the Sister, was saying in the slow, low, penetrating voice of one about to die :

"No, Sister, it is not . . . dying . . . that frightens me. . . . I am ready . . . if it were only I . . . but he, my Sister." . . . And she glanced at the child. "When I shall be no longer there . . . so young a child . . . what will become of him?"

"Come, come," said Sister Philomène

"you are going to recover . . . we shall cure you, shall we not, Monsieur Barnier?"

"Certainly . . . we shall cure you, . . ."

replied the house-surgeon, slowly and with difficulty bringing out his words.

"Oh!" said the sick woman, with a broken-hearted smile, and half-closed eyes. "You cannot understand, Sister, . . . a poor child left all alone in the world. . . . He had but me. . . ."

"As a Christian, you cannot doubt God's goodness and mercy. . . . He will not abandon your child. . . ."

And from Sister Philomène's lips rose an exhortation, which became a prayer, and seemed to lift up and stretch wings out to God, over the bed of the dying woman and the poor little unhappy orphan.

When the Sister had finished, the patient remained silent for a time, and then she sighed :

"Yes, Sister, I know . . . but to leave him . . . without knowing; . . . if I were only sure he would have food . . . bread even . . . if I only were certain he would have bread every day!" And the tears streamed from her eyes half-dimmed by death.

Barnier, after putting on the mustard-plasters, had remained motionless at the bedside, turning his back on the woman ; his hands behind him played nervously with the iron post of the bedstead, when suddenly, carried away by one of those impulses that sometimes seize hold of the strongest, he turned round, and in a short, abrupt voice said to the dying woman:

“Well, if that is all you want, you may make your mind easy. . . . I have a kind old mother who lives in the country. . . . She says the house seems too big now I have left. . . . It is an easy matter ; your boy will keep her company. . . . And I can answer for it, she does not make children unhappy.”

“Oh !” said the woman, who seemed to revive for a moment, “God will reward you !”

And she drew the child toward her in an ardent embrace, as though she wished, before giving him up to another woman, to fill his memory with his mother’s last kiss.

“Yes,” repeated the Sister, looking at the surgeon—“yes, indeed, God will reward you.”



XIII.

SISTER PHILOMÈNE, now accustomed to the hospital, soon found her pleasure there, and in time this life, confined to the limits of a sick-ward, had for her a singular attraction. She became attached to this existence, to the place where she spent most of her days, where her heart had full play ; the spot familiar to her devotion, the narrow circle in which her occupations were centred. The world, its tidings and turmoil, were but a murmur that died out around her, that she no longer heard.

These walls, beds, sick women, closed the

horizon of her sight as well as the horizon of her mind ; she neither sought nor dreamed of anything beyond. And she found in the hospital ward the impression of rest and peace conveyed by the sight of the garden of a country parsonage losing itself among the tombs of the churchyard.

A peaceful calm dwelt in her. Her sacrifice, her labors, a life so full of work, had settled and strengthened her religious sentiments. Piety had now become part of her character ; she had found her crowning joy and recompense in the never-varying fervor to which she had attained, and which the excited, feverish, and overstrained faith of her childhood and youth had so long and so vainly asked of God with the effort, excess, violence, and impatience of human passion. She had no need to evoke the presence of God ; she felt as if it were ever near her. The fears, doubts, and bitterness of her early weakness had now disappeared ; her countenance reflected a calm and placid spirit ; she enjoyed a full and undisputed possession of God's grace, and drew from an infinite divine love—like the inexhaustible source from which Saint Catherine filled her cup—the gifts of terrestrial beatitude, Christian joy, cheerful

and beaming happiness, the radiant kindliness that endows women with the gifts of angels.

The void within her was filled, all her being satisfied. Her sensitiveness, formerly so prone to exaltation and ever ready to turn to love, her instinctive tenderness, so cruelly wounded by indifference and contempt, had found in the exercise of charity appeasement, satisfaction, and activity, a happiness that was almost voluptuous in its completeness. When, after having spent the day in dressing the wounds of the poor, in which her heart saw those of Christ, the Sister, her task once ended, slowly returned to her cell and thought over the comfort her hands and words had given, the sufferings she had allayed, the hopes she had encouraged, the good she had been able to do, the lives she had cheered and death-beds she had consoled—it seemed to her that she bore away with her the grateful look and the thankful words of all the sufferers; and there rose within her breast an ineffable joy, a joy that was not of the earth, earthly, a joy that resembled no human happiness or pleasure, a joy with which she felt her heart overflow within her, and which poured itself forth in a hymn of triumph.



XIV.

THE child adopted by Barnier's mother—the *brat*, as Barnier called him—had become a link between the Sister and house-surgeon, and a common interest that drew them together. Their thoughts met on the subject. "My mother writes me word . . . the brat sends a kiss, . . ." Barnier would say as he passed the Sister in his morning rounds with the head-physician. Then, after a time, they chatted about the boy; the usual innocent jokes that make up the intercourse between Sisters and resident doctors were followed up by short conversations, gay or serious, about

the hospital or the patients. When the afternoon dressing was not too protracted and Barnier had time to spare, he went into the Sister's closet ; and there, seated on a chair near her wicker arm-chair, he often spent a quarter of an hour talking to her. The Sister, full of her patients, asked him questions about the *Manual*, how such or such a medicine or draught should be administered, and nearly always drifted, in the course of conversation, into all that still remained to be done in hospitals to improve the usefulness of the charity, to arrive at a more perfect realization of an ideal hospital. They exchanged their ideas on innovations and improvements, and, inspired by her theme, the Sister intrusted the future to the hands of the house-surgeon, when he should be a famous surgeon and should have a hospital under his charge. The air, that ought to be renewed oftener, was a great topic ; a different system of ventilation to be discovered, which, without letting in the cold, should carry off the impure air and bring in the fresh ; the pewter pots and pans which the Sister considered inefficient to keep the broths and slops hot, which ought to be replaced by thick china, even with the chance of a little breakage ; then the dead,

who might be removed in a less ostentatious manner, less painfully, than in that dreadful box—on a stretcher, for instance, like invalids taken away for an operation ; and the attendants and under-nurses, whose pay of ten shillings a month ought to be raised if it were expected they should have some honesty, and should not seek to make money out of both living and dead, taking toll from the sick and robbing the corpses. In fact, there was no end to the reforms in management, customs, and rules that the Sister and house-surgeon did not, in their utopian zeal, dream of in their model hospital.

One afternoon, when they had talked longer than usual on this matter, the Sister said as she got up : “ Monsieur Barnier, you must promise me one thing. . . .”

“ Speak, Sister.”

“ When you are become a famous surgeon ” —Barnier smiled at the Sister’s habitual exordium—“ I . . . if I am still in this world . . . and I shall not have changed—I shall merely wear a black veil, that is all—and I shall still be in an hospital. . . . Well . . . no one knows . . . perchance . . . I may find myself again in a ward under your supervision. . . . I want you to promise that you will

never refuse me any delicacies for my patients."

"If that is all," replied Barnier, and he held up his hand, "well, I swear I will ruin the hospitals in wings of chicken, wine, and fried whittings."





XV.

THESE friendly chats, so pleasant to Philomène, these talks constantly renewed on endless pretexts, lengthened by degrees and assumed a tone of confidential intimacy. They soon became the Sister's principal distraction. They formed the one recreation of her day, the unexpected event in her round of life ; they gave her a little of the outer air to breathe. In this exchange of thoughts which brightened her work, that attachment to self from which the hospital life had freed her reasserted its dominion. She freely permitted herself the distraction, ever fresh and new, of talking with the surgeon, who in speech led her to reveal her remembrances, her ignorance, her curiosity, her imagination on most subjects.

In these conversations she displayed an ingenuousness that took from her all appearance of false modesty. She talked with the surgeon in a familiar, almost brotherly, manner. Sometimes, indeed, she asked him questions that were embarrassing in their very naïveté.

Words fell from her as they fall from the lips of innocence. Absolutely pure in thought, she unbosomed herself in the most perfect serenity of conscience. She was, in fact, candor itself.

And not only had her speech the severity of virgin frankness ; charity brought her without distinction to suffering men and women alike, and the daily practice of the devotion which trained her heart to a courage above that of her sex—the hospital, in short—set upon her lips that accent of virile liberty, that strangely masculine utterance, not without grace, peculiar to Sisters of Charity.



XVI.

FROM hospital affairs, the conversation little by little had turned to things of the outer world : the Sister asked Barnier the news of the day, and inquired about what was going on in Paris, in the world of which she now heard nothing but the rumbling of the carriage-wheels that at night reached her cell. She asked what changes had taken place, what alterations in the Champs Elysées or Tuileries Gardens, her childhood's recollections—all that she vaguely remembered, as a blind person might inquire about

her native town, that she was never to see again.

All that penetrated to her ears as a faint echo outside furnished a theme for her questions ; she asked about a new church that was being built, a military review, a fresh street laid out in a quarter she had known ; about a dinner party the house-surgeon had been to at his senior surgeon's ; about a murderer she had heard the patients talk about ; about the masks on Shrove Tuesday—in fact, on every and the most diverse subjects. The house-surgeon was very much amused by the Sister's curiosity, and her questioning like a child or a prisoner ; and, speculating upon her credulity, he sometimes made up such wonderful stories that he was himself obliged to laugh and stop short.

“ Oh ! how clever, is it not,” she would say, rather vexed, “ to take in a person who knows nothing of what is going on ! ”

In mentioning one day in the course of conversation that he had gone up the Rue de la Chaussée d'Antin, she at once asked him if he had noticed about the middle of the street such and such a house, if the shop on the left still bore a certain name, if a stationer were yet next door to a china-shop.

“Why, Sister,” said Barnier smiling, “do you suppose that I can remember all the houses of the streets I pass through?”

“Ah! that’s true,” she answered ingenuously; “but I fancy I see it all.”

“Oh! if you care about it, I promise to look next Wednesday, when I shall be that way again.”

“Ah! thank you; . . . will you remember the number? . . . You will see whether in the shop next door there is still a fat man with ridiculously short arms . . . and in the other a little girl—she must be a big girl now—she had red hair, so you would easily recognize her. . . . You must look up to the fourth story. . . . I should cry if I were to see those windows again,” added the Sister as though she were talking to herself. “I was quite a small child then,” she resumed, addressing the house-surgeon after a pause.



XVII.

SOMETIMES the surgeon was in a teasing mood. On such days he amused himself by tormenting Sister Philomène on religion. He would argue, philosophize, dispute with mischievous persistency, but yet handle his subject with as light a touch as that with which a well-mannered man makes fun of the tastes of a young girl he honors, or the convictions of a woman he respects. He would press the Sister, worry her by jesting in order to make her speak and reply to him. He would have liked to make her impatient ; but the Sister understood his manœuvres and

guessed his intention from the smile that he could not conceal. She would allow him to talk, look at him, and then laugh. The surgeon, with his most serious air, would renew his arguments, seeking for those that might most embarrass the Sister ; trying, for example, to prove to her by scientific reasons the impossibility of such and such a miracle. The Sister, undisturbed, replied by evading the question with a jest, a sally of natural mother wit and honest common sense, by one of those simple and happy phrases that faith puts into the mouths of the ignorant and the simple. One day, pushed to the far end, Barnier said to her :

“ After all, Sister, suppose heaven does not exist : you will be famously sold.”

“ Yes,” replied Sister Philomène, laughing, “ but if it does, you will be much more sold than I.”



XVIII.

“WELL, I have been to see your invalid, Sister ; she will be about again in a week. I am a messenger of good news to-day : there is not one case of erysipelas among the operations this morning. Are you not glad to hear that Number ‘Twenty-five has pulled through all right ?”

“Oh, poor woman ! yes, indeed. Don’t I seem pleased ?”

“Yes, certainly, . . . but not as much as usual.”

“Well, perhaps you are right, Monsieur Barnier ; . . . the truth is that I am out of sorts to-day ; I am in dread of something disagreeable.”

She stopped, and as the surgeon did not speak, she went on :

"Oh ! it is no secret. You know we Sisters are not allowed to attach ourselves to anything. . . . That is why we are so often moved from ward to ward while we are novices. Well, I know I must expect it. . . . I have often thought of it. . . . But still, when I heard the question of sending me over to the men's side being discussed the other day, it had an odd effect on me . . . it quite pained me. . . . I can't tell you why. . . . I am so used to my ward, to my patients, to the faces around me, to my little room, to . . . everything here, in short. It is wrong to feel so, I know, but I can't help it."

"It is not decided, is it ?"

"No, not yet, . . . but I am afraid."

"Well then, we are both on the wing. . . . Only I shall not only change wards but hospitals. In a few months I shall be at the end of my two years as house-surgeon here. . . . I shall have to go away somewhere else. . . . I shall be sacked one of these days !—forgive me, a slang word from the surgeon's room—I shall be out of place. Like you, I shall be vexed to change. . . . I know that by applying and making a stir, as the committee is pleased with me, I might perhaps obtain a third year here as a favor."

“ Ah ! you too will be vexed to change ? ” said the Sister. “ But for you ”—she went on after a silence, with bent face—“ for you it is not the same as with us. . . . It is our duty to go away, especially when it costs us a pang not to remain where we are used to being. But for you there are no such reasons. You must ask to stay here, Monsieur Barnier. It would be a nice thing for me to have to tell your patients that you were going to leave them. I should be well received ! ”





XIX.

"YES, we had a very good time," said the surgeon to the Sister. "We spent the day in the woods at Meudon. I went with Malivoire, the surgeon of the Saint-Jean ward, and we came back by Bellevue. We turned at the end of the Castle Avenue by a road to the right . . . a charming little by-road ; . . . there was the Seine below, . . . we could see it through the trees ; . . . the

evening was closing in . . . it was splendid. We came from there by boat to Neuilly. . . . Such an exquisitely mild night ! It is really a very pretty country all about Bellevue. . . .”

“ Ah ! it is pretty ? ”

“ You have never been there ? ”

“ No, I only know Saint-Cloud. Is it finer than Saint-Cloud ? ”

“ Finer ? well, brighter. . . . There is such a view. . . . Do you know Saint-Germain ? ”

“ No.”

“ Ah ! that is the place for a view. From the terrace one can see I don't know how many miles of country spread out like a map. Do you mean to say you have never been anywhere except to Saint-Cloud ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ There are so many pretty spots. Chaton, for instance ; . . . and, indeed, on every side. . . . One has only to get out of Paris and go straight on. . . . Bougival, again, is delightful. . . . I could go on till to-morrow telling you of places I remember—all green, full of trees by the river-side ; . . . places that positively look as if they were happy, upon my word, and where even bad wine seems good. . . .”

“ I shall never see all that,” said the Sister.



XX.

THE Sister in her closet, one knee on her arm-chair, was with deft hand busily passing her little feather dust-brush over the black frame of a colored lithograph of Sainte-Thérèse, and over the other articles of furniture of her room, when Barnier passed by the door. Half-turning her head, she threw a word to him over her shoulder with a smile :

“I am to remain. . . .”

And, as if she did not wish to say more,

she turned herself gayly to the toilet of her little room, giving sharp sweeps of the feather brush to the table that sent the paper tickets fluttering to the floor.





XXI.

“Do you know, I admire you, Sister?”

“Why?” said the Sister, astonished at the nervous voice in which Barnier spoke that morning.

“... I admire and congratulate you on finding causes for faith and reasons for hope here in a hospital ward. I wish I could be like you; I wish it all made me believe in something, seeing all this suffering and death; ... but I must be badly organized, I suppose, for it has just the contrary effect upon me.”

“You are rather out of sorts to-day, Monsieur Barnier; I can see that.”

“Come now, frankly, does no doubt ever assail you when you look at that line of beds, when you think of what lies beneath those sheets? The hospital speaks to you of a Providence, my Sister? . . . To die—that is natural enough. If it were only a question of dying! But why so much suffering? Why illness? Ah! I can assure you there are days when my mind revolts at it. . . . You can see an Eternal Father to be thanked at the end of that frightful vista. . . . For me, he who can poison the life he gave, torture the body he made; he who invented the implacable necessity for doctors and surgeons—the God of the hospital, in short—is a deaf and merciless God, a God of bronze and of blood like the Christ hanging yonder. . . .”

“Monsieur Barnier, I pronounced my vows last Monday,” said the Sister, in a tone that sealed the surgeon’s lips.



XXII.

"Au ! Sister, the Rue de la Bienfaisance is by no means close at hand. In a little square just by it there were dresses hanging up to dry on a cord stretched between two trees, that looked exactly like Blue Beard's wives. Your invalid—what a case of true Parisian poverty ! For sheets and for counterpane she had . . . a heap of shavings ! And upon them the child was born !"

"Good heavens ! is it possible ? Shavings !"

"All of which did not interfere with the fact that, at the foot of the bed—such a bed as it was—lay a superb infant, strong as a

horse, and shouting as lustily as any one may wish. I examined her ; there's very little the matter with her—a mere nothing. I have just been telling her mother so as I came through the ward.”

“Ah ! that was kind of you ; the poor woman was dreadfully anxious ; she could hardly lie still. Now, you know, I have not done with you yet ; you must go for me to the husband of my Number Twelve ; you understand ? You will not get paid any more than for the woman of to-day . . . but it is I who will be answerable for your fees. Every time you make a visit for me in the family of one of my poor people I will say a prayer for you, a heart-felt prayer. . . . And a prayer from me is well worth forty sous ” (twenty pence), “is it not, Monsieur Barnier ?”



XXIII.

IN the month of September Barnier took a holiday. On his return the Sister gayly welcomed him, saying: "What a grand holiday you have had, to be sure! Why, you have grown quite fat, and what a color! You have been enjoying yourself, indeed."

"Yes, that I have. I had a lot of shooting. My little lad carried my game-bag, and thought nothing of the weight. You have

no idea how the little fellow has grown ; he nearly comes up to my shoulder now. My mother intends to bring him up to town for a few days this winter, and then you will see. What a blessing it is to live in the open air ! Since my return here I find bad smells everywhere, just like sailors when they first go to sea again, just for two or three days."

"And is that all you did in your whole month ?"

"Oh ! yes ; I went to a wedding, the wedding of one of my cousins. Such a wedding-breakfast ! It took place in a little wood belonging to the father-in-law. We danced for a week ; the guests came every morning, and left every evening. They kept it up like that as long as there was anything to eat and drink. The last day they made a bon-fire with the empty casks."

"Didn't it make you think of getting married ?"

"I ! . . . Oh ! it's not likely that fancy will take me yet awhile."

"Don't say that ; you will marry, it is part of your business to marry. It must be such a relief after a day spent amid suffering and the horrible sights that doctors have to see, to find at the end something that takes it all

out of one's head— a home, a wife waiting at the fireside. You must really feel the want of this happiness when you return from your rounds. And then children ! They are the very thing for you ; children who will make you plenty of noise, and whom their mother will teach to pray at night for your patients. . . .”





XXIV.

ONE morning the Sister did not appear. She was absent several days from the ward, and was seen nowhere. For nearly a month past she had been heard to complain of unbearable headaches. When she returned to her work, she was pale as death, but took up her service with undiminished ardor, ever quick and active, and seemed to have recovered the full regularity and strength of her former health.



XXV.

It was New Year's Eve. The Sister was talking with the surgeon, taking the tone, half-playful, half-serious, of an elder sister reading a gentle lecture to a brother of twenty :

" You were very fine yesterday, when you went out at five o'clock in such a hurry ? "

" I was going to dine out. "

" You don't look first-rate this morning. You are ill ? "

" Not a bit, but I came home late. "

" You sat up all night, I bet ? "

" Oh ! all night . . . that is to say. . . . "

"It is Monsieur Malivoire who leads you away, I am certain."

"Malivoire? . . . Oh, poor fellow!"

"But what can you do to spend a whole night like that, when you might be sleeping? Sleep is such a delicious thing. Every night of my life I have to remind myself of my vows, and renew my sacrifice. If there were no bell to wake me, I should sleep all day. Laziness would have been my pet sin if I had been my own mistress. Can dancing be as amusing as all that?"

"But I have not been to a ball. . . ."

"Oh! I know what you did, then. You sat smoking in a room where you were all smoking. That's what does the harm! And then you played at cards, didn't you? and for money, I am sure. How naughty of you, instead of going to bed in good time. I am not joking. Your mother would say just the same as I do."

"What is this?" asked Barnier, embarrassed by the conversation, and kicking his foot against a bundle that lay on the floor under the Sister's table.

"Will you be good enough not to kick? You will break—" and she stopped—"my New Year's gifts! You would like to know

what it is, would you not? Oh! it is well wrapped up; you won't see anything. However, I won't keep you in suspense. When I was quite little, I was taken to the *Enfant-Jésus*" (the children's hospital) "one New Year's day to see a little girl. On all the children's beds, do you know what I saw? I have never forgotten it. There were playthings and harmless sweets. It was a princess, they told us, who had sent all that. It was charming! The pale faces of the sick children looked so bright and happy. If you could have seen them playing in their beds! Well, as no one does anything here on that day for my patients, all the children who come here to-morrow shall have a toy and a little parcel of sweetmeats; just as at the *Enfant-Jésus*. And you will see whether the mothers won't be better pleased even than the children."



XXVI.

“THERE were four of us : myself, Dubertrand, Noël, and his mistress. She is very taking, that girl of his.”

It was Malivoire who spoke, as he lighted his candle at the gas-jet in the surgeons' room, addressing himself to Barnier, who, seated by the table, on his turn of night duty, was resting his head in his hands with his eyes fixed on a medical work he was studying.

“Yes, it was great fun. . . . The butler looked after us ; you remember he was here, under Noël's care. He brought us up some wine. . . . What wine ! like sloe juice !”

Here Malivoire seated himself on the table, still holding the lighted candle in his hand.

"Yes," he went on, "she is decidedly pretty, that mistress of Noël's."

"What do I care?" said Barnier.

"Would you like to hear what we had for dinner? First of all when we got there—not a place to be had. They had to lay our dinner in the bedroom of the manager's wife, and over the bed hung her wedding-wreath under a glass shade. The wreath looked so foolish staring at us up there that at the end we made a salad of it. Well, it wasn't good. By the way, Emma was there. . . . She asked after you. . . . Ah! Barnier, talking of Emma, do you know it is really very odd?"

"What?"

"That you have never been known to have a mistress, . . . no lasting attachment, call it what you will—a habit, if you like; you have never stuck to any woman more than twelve hours."

"Well, twelve hours of any woman, don't you think that enough?"

And Barnier, twirling his chair round and seating himself astride of it, said, as he reached his hand toward a pipe forgotten on the table:

“Malivoire, I am ashamed of you. Your ideas upon women are altogether astray. Do you know how our elders understood the matter? Better than you do, my fine fellow. When they had worked for a month or so, having their food brought to them in the amphitheatre to save time, . . . worked day and night, mind you ; what really may be called working. . . . Well, to shake it all off, they would rush into Paris like wolves, fling themselves into some place where they could have food, wine, and women. Thirty-six hours of it—a regular sailor’s orgy ! That was the old school, the school of Bichat and the rest ; men built of real hard stuff and strong ; who could drink something stronger than soda-water ; and that school was the right one, old man !”

“Well, I maintain, on the other hand—this is a stupid thing I am going to say to you, but it is true—I maintain that there are no men who need so much as we do to mix with passion something more than what you talk of, something else beyond mere desire. Yes, it sounds like a paradox, as much as you please ; but for us, women ought not to be that at all. It is all the surroundings of women, the graces and embellishments, that are

good for us. It is the dress, the illusions, the pretty nonsense—in short, everything that is not the brutal fact ! It is this that has the best chance of attracting us ; because, in this material, hopelessly material profession of ours our dreams and illusions must needs find an outlet and some satisfaction.”

“ Why, Malivoire, you are as platonic to-night as a drunken man.”

“ I ! Not in the least ; only, I am telling you. . . .”

“ You talk nonsense ! ” said Barnier impatiently and with growing animation ; he resumed : “ If you were to say to me that after all we see the more we hunger after something young and fresh, a creature in the fullest bloom of life, beaming with life from head to foot, a body before which the memory of illness, age, infirmity fades, a woman who seems a living defiance to death, flesh that you might wish to dig your teeth into, as if it were splendid fruit, a skin from which the blood starts at the mere prick of a pin. . . .”

Barnier stopped short. He stared vaguely for a moment at the table crowded with empty bottles, cups of coarse pottery, saucers full of cigarette ends and matches drowned

in the upset coffee ; knives tossed onto the napkins, the plate of broken sugar, the well-colored clay pipes scattered here and there ; then resting his glance upon Malivoire :

“ You think I know nothing about love ? You think I have never loved, don't you ? ”

At this moment the glass door of the surgeons' room opened. A man entered, wearing a pointed beard, his blouse fastened round the waist by a belt. He had the immovable, pallid, cynical face common to the male attendants in a hospital. Keeping his hands in his pockets, he said to Barnier as he slouched in :

“ It is for Number Nine of the Saint-Paul ward. You know the fellow you *tambouriné la paille** this morning. He says he is suffocating, and he complains of it.”

* Auscultated.



XXVII.

"IT is dreadful!" said Sister Philomène one evening to Barnier; "I cannot get rid of these neuralgic headaches. To-day I can hardly see. . . . Cannot you give me something to cure them?"

"Indeed, I hardly know of any remedy. Stop, though, I can tell you of something that does me good; . . . it might do you good also."

Barnier made a ward-maid bring a cup of black coffee, and taking up a bottle of laudanum—

"There," he said ; " fifteen drops of laudanum in a cup of black coffee ; that's my remedy. . . ."

"Fifteen drops !" said the Sister, startled.

"I should take forty ; . . . however, I will only put in ten for you. . . ." And letting the drops fall one by one, he added : "It is the law of contraries, which, by opposition . . . between us, I really don't know what they do ; but what is certain is that it cures neuralgia like a charm. . . . You will only be a little long in getting asleep, that's all. . . . Now, drink it up and you'll bless me."

After one gulp, the Sister paused and said merrily :

"I hope you will come and inquire to-morrow morning if you have poisoned me?"

"To-morrow ? Impossible, Sister. . . . I'm off for a couple of days in the country . . . to a friend's. . . . He has written to tell me the wild duck are over. . . . You see I'm not so very anxious about you."



XXVIII.

THE fatigue of the day's work generally exhausted and used up the Sister, and she had to struggle and fight off sleep every evening to be able to bring her prayers to a conclusion.

This evening, however, her very lassitude seemed to keep her feverishly awake. She spent hours—heard one quarter of an hour after another strike—tossing restlessly under the bed-clothes that smothered her, seeking at every moment in the heated bed some fresh

place to stretch her limbs and rest her cheek. Her dozing was cut short by sudden shocks that gave her the sensation of falling from a height ; and her slumbers were filled by those dreams which are the strange torment of women living in the chastity of a cloistered life.

She fancied herself in space wherein all was light, though nothing visible to the eye save flashes like those of a thousand candles sparkling through cut glass. The light resembled flashes rolling among clouds—the radiancy of summer seen through a gossamer veil. In front of her spread vast horizons, unpeopled yet full of life. Life everywhere, as in a ray of sun, resplendent though invisible. These spaces were full of the silence of a summer's day at noon—of the sighing of the hushed winds, of the sleeping corn, of the repose of mother earth, of the flight of songless birds, of melodies that were but murmurs and sighs. She seemed to inhale a breeze laden with morning dew, something like the moist dust scattered by the splash of a fountain. She was enveloped in all kinds of sweet and confused sensations, arising from veiled harmonies and shimmering lights, from mirages and echoes that lulled in a soft mist the airy

dream of her slumbering senses. In the midst of this vision, in which she was oblivious of self, she felt on her neck a gentle touch, like that of a fly which in the morning rests or hovers over the face of a sleeper. She strove, in her dream, to chase away this touch which, ever flitting from place to place, came back with a teasing importunity ; but soon her hand became too slow and indolent to rid her of the sensation, which after being irritant was now almost soothing. And it was no longer a fly that brushed across her neck ; it seemed as though two butterfly wings fluttered quicker and quicker against her skin. Then there came a moment when their touch became a caress. The two wings wandered instead of flying, and were two lips, two lips that had neither body nor face, nothing in the whole space but two lips : a mouth—a kiss—a kiss like a soft caress whispering in her ear, a kiss which at last grew painful as a sting.



XXIX.

It is half past eight o'clock. The morning slowly dawns after a long February night, and the first light of a fine winter's day streams over the Sainte-Thérèse ward through the old greenish glass of the window panes.

In the middle of the ward some twenty young men, house-surgeons, dressers, and students in their second year, nicknamed *bedouins*, a portfolio under their arm, stand near a stove. They cluster round their chief, a pale old man with long white hair tucked

behind his ears, and bushy black eyebrows shading a pair of sharp eyes full of youth and kindliness. The old man, dressed in a tail coat, white tie, and the rosette of the Legion of Honor in his button-hole, wears a great white apron that covers him up to the neck. A dark red velvet skull-cap placed over his white hair sets off his wide brows. He is calm and smiling ; looks around him at the young men, as he absently moves his hands over the stove and appears amused at some joke he has just uttered. Some of the young men who surround him have looped the corner of their large white apron to the button of their coat ; others have fastened little bits of cloth full of pins to their lapels ; and all talk gayly but in a low tone, respectful both of the master and the place they are in. However, the young men greet one another in whispers, and at moments the murmur of a woman's name, or a reminiscence of a ball-room could be heard. Other groups are speaking to the patients. Two of the younger students, pursuing each other, stop by the side of a bed in which an invalid tightly presses her knees against her chin, and placing their elbows on the empty space at the foot of the bed, playfully struggle with clasped hands.

On a long table placed between two stoves lie a quantity of bandages already rolled. A pile of little sponges is placed near a heap of snowy white lint, and a small box full of pots of yellow or brown ointment stands alongside, with the ends of spatulas sticking out. A spirit-lamp sends a fitful flicker on the copper basins, and on the two pewter fountains at each end of the table, used one for washing and the other for tisanes. A house-surgeon, bending over the table, consults a large book, the different columns of which are headed thus: Tisanes: remedies, external and internal; broths, with rice, with vermicelli, with meat, with milk; bread soups: with meat or without; solid food No. 1, 2, 3, 4; dietetic drinks: wine, milk. Standing with her back to the table, a stout, short ward-maid rubs up a tin water-jug, which shines in her big hands, while she blinks her little, red-edged eyes.

The ward is well aired and has no odor; only a kind of damp heat pervades the whole room—the tepid atmosphere of a bath-room.

In the clear, cold, pale daylight each bed, with its woollen quilt or eider-down cover, and its tester of white dimity catching the

light, stands sharply defined as a square of white. Rays of light shine on the foot of the beds, run over the sheets, flit over the sleeves of patients sitting up in bed. The placards above the beds display their outlines all along the ward, white when the bed is occupied, black when it is empty. In the bluish glimmer can be seen over the bedsteads small shelves above the patients' heads, on which are pots of jam, medicine bottles, oranges, and sometimes a book. Between the open curtains hang the little bars by which the invalids raise themselves.

There lie the women, many of whom appear shrouded in their sheets. A cheek, a bit of forehead, a round and huddled-up body, is all that can be seen of them on the bolster or under the blankets. Others lie on their backs motionless, their knees upraised making sharp angles. Several with heads up-lifted on pillows clasp their right wrists with their left hand, with an abstracted gaze, in the attitude of a person feeling his own pulse. In the beds near the door a certain commotion is going on ; a kind of toilet, a little coquettish preparation, revives the strength of the least suffering. Their thin, blue-veined hands tremblingly button the

cuff of a night-gown or flatten the wrinkles from a night-jacket ; one patient carefully takes down a trimmed cap, pinned up inside the bed-curtains, while another smooths her hair.

They are all pallid, of a pallor that looks ashen when contrasted with the whiteness of the sheets, pillows, and curtains. Lying thus expectant, so wan against the clear white of the linen, their eyes dilated by fever, these poor workingwomen no longer seem to belong to their own class ; each one bears that singular appearance of distinction that illness seems to impart to the women of the people, as though there were in reality in every woman—be she great lady or workwoman from the most poverty-stricken part of the town—the same charm and grace developed by suffering !

The students have hung their hats on the placards over the beds ; and the chairs have been piled up on end, to leave a free passage for the surgeon.

Near a window, with her back to the light, her white veil throwing a luminous halo around, Sister Philomène stands knitting a stocking.

“Come, gentlemen,” says the Head Sur-

geon, and walking to the end of the ward, he goes up to the first bed on the left-hand side. Upright, walking stiffly, he advances with a slow, regular step over the polished tiles. The ward-maid follows him, carrying in one hand a towel and a pewter jug, in the other a pewter basin that she rests against her hip.

When the head surgeon stops at a bed, it is immediately surrounded by the junior surgeons, who press round, bending over the patient, pushing their heads over or under one another.

A silence, an anxious and respectful, almost solemn, silence reigns over the whole ward. The pen of the student who has charge of the prescription books, and who writes leaning against the foot of the bed, can be heard scratching busily. All are quiet, every suffering is hushed as the head surgeon passes along, going from patient to patient with the same gentle, imperturbable face, a hopeful and encouraging smile, cheering and cheerful words, sometimes even a good-natured joke.

"Well!" he says to a woman on whose throat he had performed an operation only a few days previously, "you know this is the

day you promised to sing us a song. Come, give us a tune."

And he listens attentively to the sounds that struggle out of the throat of the brightened and enlivened patient.

"An extra ration for Number Nine," says the doctor after a moment's pause by a bedside. A smile reanimates the countenance of the pale young woman seated in the bed, while life flashes again into her fevered and hollow eyes like a spark of radiant joy.

The doctor had reached the last bed but one, bed Number 29.

"Ah! yesterday's arrival," he said, reading the placard at the foot of the bed.

The patient unfastened her night-dress, and a house-surgeon raised the bed-curtains to allow the daylight to fall upon her while the head surgeon made his examination. The patient watched the surgeon's face, but it remained impassible.

After a few seconds, the curtain fell back in its place. The woman, with closed eyes, heard the doctor turn away and move off. Then a sudden terror sent an icy shudder down her back, and she dived into the bed, pulled up the clothes, and buried her head in the pillows.

“Is Monsieur Barnier there?” inquired the doctor as he passed on to the next bed, and he raised his head, scrutinizing the group of young doctors. “Here he comes,” replied a voice.

The students were gathered round the bed at which the head surgeon had stopped. Barnier slipped behind them, on the side next to the one the surgeon had just quitted.

He stood opposite the surgeon, waiting for him to speak, when he suddenly felt from behind a hand seize his own. He turned around, and stood terrified, like a man who beholds the spectre of a woman he has loved.

“What are they going to do to me, Barnier?” said the patient in a low tone.

“You!” said Barnier, “you here?”

“What are they going to do to me, eh? tell me.”

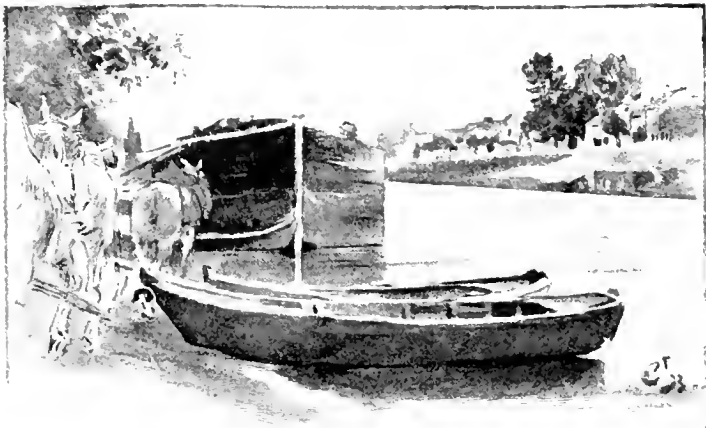
“Monsieur Barnier!” the surgeon called out as he was leaving.

Barnier went to him, and as he was going down-stairs the surgeon said :

“Monsieur Barnier, I understand that the house-surgeons complain that they leave the hospitals without having had any opportunity of performing operations. I am willing, therefore, to give you a trial. To-morrow you will

operate on the new arrival, Number Twenty-nine. You saw her: a *lardaceous encephaloid* in the right breast. I advise a convex bistoury for the tegumentary incision, and a straight knife for the remainder of the operation; and curve your first incision."





XXX.

THE surgeon went on talking, but Barnier no longer heard him.

He had loved this woman, and had been her first lover. She, too, had been his first love—the first awakening of his passions. She came from the village in which he was born—a tiny river-side village on the banks of the Marne. Her father was the owner of the towing-horses along the Meaux Canal. The village, with its long line of straight poplar trees, the river, the ducks, the horses that went down to water, the slated roofs, the house, her window, where in the evening

the dark green of the vine leaves stood out against the lighted curtains ; the first kiss he had imprinted on her neck ; the barn full of hay, where the sun streaming through the door played upon the edge of her gown ; the little wall which she jumped over, when all the house was asleep, to go off to the ball, and the little gully where they wandered in summer time—how far and yet how near it all seemed, how lost in the past, and yet how living, as if it were but yesterday !

And when she had insisted on following him to Paris, where he had come to study medicine, what happy days they had spent—a carnival full of folly, excursions in the country, improvised suppers at the foot of their bed ; her delight at a new and becoming gown, and the little fits of jealousy dissipated in a caress ! Till at last she had left him, and his student's room, still full of her memory, had seemed to him empty—empty as a warm nest from which the birds have flown.

All these recollections rushed in headlong confusion to his mind, and floated before his eyes.



XXXI.

AFTER going the round of the men's wards, Barnier returned to the bedside of the sick woman.

"What did he say to you?" she asked, catching hold of his hands. "Will you have to use—your instruments?"

And Barnier felt her shudder.

"No, no," stammered Barnier. "Ah! my poor Romaine, how sad to see you here!"

"Ah, yes ! But I have led such a life since I left you. I have had ups and downs—more downs than anything else," she added, with a forced smile. "It has not always been fun. You see, there are men who must break everything when they are drunk, glasses—women. And this is the result of a blow from my last lover—look !" And she bared her bosom.

"Will they cut it off ; tell me, they won't cut it off, will they ?"

At the same moment Sister Philomène drew near the bed, and in a tone that Barnier had never heard from her lips :

"Number Twenty-nine," she said, "you are talking too loud ; you disturb your neighbors, and you yourself need quiet, a great deal of quiet."

And the Sister went up to the bedside, and almost drove Barnier from it, sharply tucking up the clothes to the very bolster.

"Sister," said Barnier, following the Sister as she left the bedside, "I wish you would try—you who know how to inspire courage ; I do not know how, in fact I cannot. . . . She is a woman I knew in former days and I have not the heart to speak to her ; she is to be operated on to-morrow. There is only to-day to prepare her. . . ."

“She is to be operated on to-morrow?” said the Sister in a singular tone, letting her words drop coldly one by one.

Barnier was obliged to repeat: “Yes, to-morrow. . . . She is afraid, you saw that; hers is a nervous, excessively nervous nature. I implore you to speak to her and prepare her. You are so kind. I have so often seen you succeed when we have failed. Tell her it will be nothing of an operation. And get her to consent without alarming her.”

After a moment’s silence the Sister said, turning her face to Barnier, who was astonished at her pained expression: “I will speak to her . . . and perhaps God will put the right words into my heart.”

Barnier went up to his room. He spent the whole day musing over the past love that had not died, and intoxicating memories rose up within him, memories filled with the pungent perfume of wild flowers and fruit. At every moment he felt tempted to go and see Romaine, but he dared not venture near her bedside; he feared a word or a question, and his fear carried the day. He remembered that the Sister was to speak to her, and trembled lest she should not succeed in deciding her to consent to the operation. The next

moment he felt persuaded that the Sister had succeeded, and then, thinking on the morrow, he shuddered. He said to himself that his place was by the side of Romaine, that he ought to help the Sister to overcome her fears, that he, too, ought to speak to her, tell her that the operator would be merciful to her poor body. . . . And he remained there, in his room, feeling all strength fail him, and his eyes wandering in spite of himself over the cold steel instruments in his case.



XXXII.

Two women were conversing in the Sainte-Thérèse ward ; one was the woman embroidering, already mentioned, and the other an old woman with a bandage over her eyes.

" I say, you who are working, can you tell me if it will soon be four o'clock ? "

" Certainly ; it is past four now ; it is getting dark enough to know that. "

" Dark enough, yes, when one has eyes. "

" Ah ! that is true ; I forgot. "

“How is it we don't hear Sister Philomène to-day? She is generally so punctual.”

“Perhaps she is not well; she did not look all right this morning. You did not notice that she never called the little girl of Number 5 to give her a trifle, as she always does. Ah! there she is. She is by the side of Number Twenty-nine. The ward-maid told me they were going to do something to-morrow to Number Twenty-nine. That is the reason she is there. She is trying all her influence to make her consent. Can you, who are nearer to her, hear what she is saying?”

“Certainly I can hear her. What a strange tone she has; not her usual nice voice, you know, the voice that would make one consent to anything.”

“Ah! well, you see there is not much time to be lost, and probably the other one is reluctant. When there is plenty of time they don't hurry one. I have had plenty of time to find that out. They coax one; ah! they know what they are about. They see at once, at a glance, if you are one of the nervous sort, as they say. Then for two or three days they say hardly anything, or, ‘We must see about that, we must think over the case,’ and vague words of that kind.

Then you begin to think about it all ; you don't know if they will operate or not, but that is of no consequence ; your imagination works, and little by little you get accustomed to the idea. When they see this, they begin to say in a careless, off-hand manner : ' If I were in your place—however, you must suit yourself—but if I were in your place, I should just get rid of that ! ' Then they leave you alone again for a day or two to think it over, till at last, one fine morning, they tell you point blank : ' My good soul, if you won't have that thing taken away, it will soon carry you off.'

" You are struck all of a heap, but as for the last week you have been in an agony of suspense, you decide on ending the whole matter. However, that is not the case with this new patient."

" What is she saying to the Sister ? Can you hear ? Does she consent ? "

" So-so, she does not say much. She is muttering something about her ' poor body ; ' that seems to be her only thought. Ah ! how harshly the Sister speaks to her, indeed. It is not in that manner she would have made me consent if I had been hesitating. How dreadfully she is talking of death, to be sure ! "

“The fact is, if one was not a little frightened, one would never consent. Ah ! the Sister has finished at last. Here she comes, and it’s true she is looking ill.”





XXXIII.

THE next day, at about eleven o'clock, two attendants, wearing caps marked A. P.* in red, came into the ward bearing a stretcher on which lay a pallid, woe-begone creature, with a hunted, haggard look, features contracted by pain, and a countenance impressed with terror, almost shame.

The house-surgeon and Sister Philomène, aided by an under-nurse, carefully placed the woman in bed, and when Romaine was once

**Assistance Publique.*

settled, with her head raised high on the pillows, and her right arm resting on a cushion, a sudden sensation of relief came over her ; the feeling of submissive fear and shame common to patients after an operation, that makes them look like children that have just been chastised.

“ I love you, Barnier ! ” she said, and she poured forth a torrent of tender, loving words, which burst from her lips like a shower of kisses, in a passion of feeling that was almost brutal.

Barnier made her a sign to be quiet, and after impressing on her the necessity of keeping still, he hastily left the ward, while on the placard at the foot of the bed was being written :

Operated on February 7th.

He met Malivoire on the stairs, who said :

“ Are you coming to breakfast ? ”

“ No,” he replied, “ I am not hungry this morning.” And hurrying to his room, faint and sick at heart, he flung himself into an arm-chair.

The figure of the woman rose up before him, relentlessly haunting him. His eyes recalled once more the fresh, youthful bosom

of the girl he had loved, on which he had often pillowed his head, and now the cold steel blade was torturing it, his own hand was lacerating it. The horrible sight would not vanish; all had begun afresh, and he seemed to be recommencing again and again the operation he had but just now performed. His apron was stained with blood, but he had not noticed it; he threw it from him and went up to the Sainte-Thérèse ward.

On seeing him, Romaine half opened her eyes and smiled to him, the speechless smile by which sick people beg to be left to their sufferings, their thoughts, to silence and to rest.

He returned several times to her bedside, and each time Romaine greeted him with the same gentle, drowsy, listless smile.

At his last visit, in the middle of the night : “ Barnier,” she said, in such a faint voice that the surgeon was obliged to bend down to hear her, “ you have seen my body after. . . . it is horrible, isn’t it ? It is a large wound. . . . I shall be an object of disgust. . . . It would be better to be dead, would it not ? Why did the Sister come and urge me ? Who will care for me now ? Ah ! yes, I had better have died. You who thought I had such a good

figure, you who were so proud of me—do you remember?—even you would not have the courage to look at the place now! It would indeed have been better to have died!”





XXXIV.

“WHY are you so restless, my child? You must try and remain quiet,” said the head surgeon the following morning.

He went up to her, looked at her, felt her pulse, then uncovering her chest, listened for a long time to her breathing. “You do not detect anything abnormal, Monsieur Barnier, do you, either in the action of the heart or lungs?”

“No, nothing.”

“Exactly, neither do I. You are going on very well, my child.”

When he reached the end of the ward, the surgeon turned to the house-surgeons and dressers, saying: “Gentlemen, I had said there would be no lecture to-day; I have changed my mind, we will go down to the amphitheatre.”

And when the surgeons and students had taken their places on the benches:

“Gentlemen,” he said, “I wish to call your attention to the patient Number Twenty-nine. The operation intrusted by me to one of you has been most skilfully performed. I could not have done it better myself than Monsieur Barnier. You have just seen that poor woman, and have noticed how carefully I examined her lungs and heart. I requested Monsieur Barnier also to repeat the experiment, and you heard us declare that we found all the organs in their normal condition. The patient is neither suffering from erysipelas, nor phlegmon, nor does her state betray symptoms of peritonitis, pleurisy, pericarditis, or any abdominal lesion. There is nothing that should alarm us, and yet I must confess I am most seriously alarmed. We are forced to ad-

mit, gentlemen, however painful the admission," the surgeon gloomily pursued, "that our knowledge and experience often meet with mysteries that thwart and humiliate us, mysteries that we cannot fathom, notwithstanding all our studies, which we fail to understand in spite of all our efforts, and which we are obliged to explain by the word, accident! because we have no other to explain the incomprehensible. Some five or six years ago I operated a patient for the same trouble; the day after the operation I found her worried, anxious, agitated, feverish, and restless, without having been able to detect any internal disorder any more than in our present case. At the end of three days she died and the post-mortem examination gave no explanation of the cause of her death nor did it reveal any important injury. Monsieur Barnier, you are now fully warned; watch your patient most carefully, and treat her by the most energetic means."



XXXV.

“I AM so thirsty ; give me something to drink !” Romaine exclaimed the moment the house-surgeon came up to her bed. “ Ah ! I don’t feel well.”

She did nothing but toss about, turn her head from side to side, stretch out her arms and raise her legs one after the other. She complained of suffocations, pains in the

back, sickness, and a general sensation of lassitude. Barnier spent the whole day and night watching and tending her, opposing violent remedies to the violence of the malady ; but his efforts were powerless to assuage the fever, calm the agitation, stanch the thirst, and lull even for an hour the restlessness of those limbs that unceasingly moved beneath the sheets.

In the morning the head surgeon changed the dressing. The wound presented a natural appearance, but the patient was in a state approaching that of delirium and her case was pronounced hopeless.





XXXVI.

ROMAINE no longer spoke to Barnier. All of a sudden, in the middle of the day, she abruptly seized his hands, entwining her fingers in his, clutching hold of him with all her might, and fixing on him her large eyes, of which the pupils had become mere black dots amid the surrounding white.

"I shall not die, shall I, Barnier?" she said, in a voice that was choked and suffo-

cated at intervals. "I will not die . . . I won't, no, I won't ! My dear Barnier, make me live. . . . I am too young to die. The priest has been ; he was here a minute ago. . . . But you are nothing but a trumpery set of doctors here, then ! . . . Oh, I've got hold of you ; you can't make me let go. . . . There ! I don't care about losing my beauty . . . do anything you like, only let me live, only that—live ! live ! . . ."

Then hardly had she uttered these words than, with a gesture of horror, she thrust away Barnier's hands, which she had been holding as in a vise.

"Ah, butcher !" she exclaimed, "how you cut away, how you hacked at me. It was nothing to you, nothing but flesh. . . . Get away ! . . . How glad I am I left you. . . . I only wish I had led a worse life, had had more fun, deceived more men !" And she laughed, but her laugh broke into sob.

"Romaine, Romaine, I entreat you ! . . ."

said Barnier.

But the dying woman again caught hold of him, her trembling hands groping along his arms in an effort to clutch hold of him.

"The others ! what do I care about them ? . . . They may all die for aught I care !

But I am young ; I am strong ; my life is not over. . . . We live to be old in our family. . . . I've never had anything the matter with me. . . . I used to cross the bridges in the winter when it was freezing, with nothing but a chemise on my back. Do you remember those Saturdays, the nights of the masked balls ? What does that dog of a Sister want, hanging round here ? Much I shall care for all her trash when I shall be out of this place ! . . . O God ! how I suffer ! . . . What thirst ! . . . Ah, butcher ! if I had caught hold of you with my teeth at the moment you'd have felt how I can bite ! . . . Yes, drink . . . give me something to drink . . . my tongue is as dry as wood !”

She drank, her fingers let go, and she sank back into the heavy, exhausted sleep which seems a foretaste of death sent to those who are about to die.

Barnier, utterly broken down, fled ; and he heard, as he passed near a sick-bed, Sister Philomène say between the curtains :

“ Yes, it is really abominable. That kind of women ought not to be admitted here. There ought to be separate rooms for them, where they would at least die without making such scandal.”



XXXVII.

DINNER was just over, and the munching of the last crusts of bread sounded through the ward like the nibbling of mice.

Two young women, in flying white caps, white jackets, and black skirts, were walking arm-in-arm up and down the room, laughing and joking like a couple of tomboys.

“ Sister ! Mother ! ” they said, repeating

in a jeering tone the names exchanged by the Sister and under-nurses. "It is quite a family affair here ; it is only sons that are never mentioned."

And they laughed aloud, till one of the two, dragging her leg, said to the other :

"Not so quick, please ; it hurts my hip."

A drawling, plaintive voice, panting at each word, issued from a bed and muttered :

"Some talk of their legs . . . others . . . of their arms . . . others . . . every one seems in pain here."

A scream rose from another bed.

"How she howls !" said the two girls as they resumed their walk up and down.

"Oh, what a milksop !" called out a patient from her bed ; "she makes herself at home. She wouldn't dare to scream like that if the doctor were here."

"Ah ! well, I shan't scream like that to-morrow," uttered a voice, striving to steady itself.

"To-morrow !" replied another, in hollow tones. "I wish to-morrow were come, that I might know what they are going to do to me."

"So would I. I would give anything this night were over."

“It’s awful to see any one die like that right under your nose,” said the patient on the right-hand side of Number Twenty-nine’s bed. “She’s been an hour picking at her sheets.”

“The lady is picking up her things ready to be off,” said the girls as they passed by.

The day was drawing to a close. A mysterious twilight had already begun to throw a veil over the whole ward, and the waning light, pale as a ray of the moon, looked like a vapor driven upward to the tops of the curtains or testers by the dark shadows rising from the floor. The dull, opaque windows showed only a patch of twilight on the uppermost panes, and above, against the curtain-rod, a last glimmer threw a wide splash of light on the first fold of the curtains. The two extremities of the ward were already enveloped in shade, but at the end where the Sister’s glass den fell under the light of a window a last faint ray of light, passing through the muslin curtains, created a kind of haze, something similar to the mist seen at dawn rising from a field covered with hoar-frost. Against this background of haze the passers to and fro were vaguely and indistinctly seen like shadows flitting by.

The little pulleys and chains by which the night-lights were suspended creaked as they worked when, one after the other, the night-lamps were lowered and brought within reach of the ward-maid who lighted them.

Then, at one end of the dark, sombre ward, where the dim flame of the farthest night-light flickered between four columns in front of a small altar, the darkness seemed to grow alive and fill with shadowy figures. It was a confused and automatic kind of gathering, seemingly increased by black or white forms at every moment, although not a step of the assembling figures, not a rustle of the crowding skirts, could be heard, so noiselessly did they move.

When they reached the circle of light cast by the night-light, into which they laboriously carried their chairs, the invalids stood revealed ; a tall, black woman, her spare form tightly wrapped in a little black shawl tied at the back, walking with her arms advanced like a person afraid of falling ; then a couple of little old women came, arm-in-arm, with short, faltering steps and bent backs, one holding up the chair which the other carried ; a tall young woman with a coil of black hair falling low on her neck moved forward alone,

looking slight and even elegant in the gray hospital costume ; then the two laughing girls ; then a woman with a colored handkerchief on her head and her arm slung in a scarf fastened to her white jacket ; then a country woman with her peasant's cap. Half-carried by two women, who supported her under each arm, a pretty young woman painfully drew near, smiling—with her head slightly thrown back—a sweet, sad smile to her companions, who, as she seemed to give way, said, encouragingly :

“ Come, come, step, Madame Lazy-bones.”

Sister Philomène, standing on the altar-steps, slowly lit the eight tapers in the two candlesticks, saying, from time to time, “ Hush ! ” without turning round, when the murmur of voices behind her grew too loud.

By degrees, as the flame rose from the candlesticks, a white Virgin with a blue silk collar, paper hydrangeas in gilded wooden vases, a little waxen infant Jesus in a manger surmounted by a pointed roof and cross over all, stood out, brilliantly revealed ; and the burning tapers cast their light on the side of the altar over the top of a tall press, where a quantity of white wooden crutches and crooked sticks had been thrown.

The patients were seated on chairs placed in a circle ; the young woman who was so weak had the only arm-chair present, and her two companions placed a pillow at her back and covered her legs with an eider-down quilt.

The Sister went up to a small bell against the wall. She rang a first peal, waited for a moment's silence, then rang a second peal and said in a clear voice, "Let us pray !" and fell on her knees on the floor in the middle of the circle before the altar.

Her voice rose amid the silence, it ascended under the vaulted roof with a penetrating vibration, and in a quiet, piercing tone that sounded like a kind of melody. It was a sharply modulated voice, pure as crystal, thin and clear like a child's ; virginal like the song of a bird ; a voice like the soul of a musical instrument which seemed to pour forth the prayer she uttered.

The Sister began by thanking God for all His mercies ; for having drawn us from nothing ; for daily bestowing His blessings upon us ; and making herself the medium of the patients' gratitude, speaking in the name of the sick, the fevered, and the suffering, she said : "*What return, O my God, can I make*

for Thy innumerable blessings ! . . . O all ye saints and angels, unite with me in praising the God of mercies, who is so bountiful to so unworthy a creature ! ” . . . And from the end of the ward a stifled murmur of voices from the bed-ridden patients mingled with her voice.

At this noise a scream came from Romaine's bed, and a confused sound of blasphemous words broke in through the prayers.

“ *Let us examine our consciences,*” continued the Sister, in the same tone. “ *Let us examine what sins we may have fallen into by thought, word, deed, or omission.* ”

And after a moment's silence, her voice rose again, clear and calm : “ *I grieve from the bottom of my heart that I have been so ungrateful to Thee for Thy benefits, and have so often offended Thee, my God and my chief good.* ”

“ The priest ! the priest ! Here, shake the curtains ! ” yelled Romaine. “ Ah ! they are at mass, they are singing. Ah ! what foolery their church is. . . . They have left the door open. . . . Barnier ! they are coming ; I hear them. . . . Ah ! the death doctor. . . . Get out, wretched priest ! ”

“ *Let us pray,*” said the Sister, in an authoritative and severely firm voice : “ *Our*

Father who art in heaven. Hallowed be thy name."

And the invalids answered from their chairs or beds with a rumbling hum, which died away by degrees as one after the other of the feeblest uttered a tardy *Amen*.

"No music! What a nuisance they are! Take away the flowers—they stink! They don't know how to sing. I tell you I know a better song than that. Wait a bit: it's a funny kind of tune," and Romaine sang:

*La petite Rosette,
Voulant voir du pays,
.
.
.
.
.
Passant à la barrière
Un commis l'arrêta,
Sui disant: "La petite mère,
Que portez vous donc là?
Approchez, belle blonde,
Approchez de plus près." **

* Little Rosette,
Wishing to travel,
.
.
.
.
.
Passing through the gates
The toll-man stopped her,
Saying: "My little woman,
What are you carrying?
Come near, fair one,
Come nearer to me."

"*Hail, Mary, full of grace . . .*" said the Sister, raising her voice, which became louder, stronger, and more dominant as she pitilessly dwelt on the last words of the *Ave*: "*Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.*"

"Come away!" cried Romaine. "I will climb over the little wall. Oh, he loved me well. Ah, I know they say he was a love-child."

"*I believe in God . . . I confess to Almighty God . . .*" said the Sister, and her emotionless voice commanded silence; it was like a hand of iron placed over the mouth of agony, sternly crushing back the delirium hovering on the lips of death.

"*Lord, have mercy . . . Christ, have mercy!*" and she let the verses fall in a harsh tone, dropping on the wretched woman the words of the Litany of the Sacred Heart one by one, like handfuls of smothering earth.

"Barnier!" called out Romaine in a broken voice that seemed a wail, "I want my teeth and my hair to be left with me . . . I won't have the amphitheatre porters. . . ."

The Sister went on: "*Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that any one who fled to thy protection, implored*

thy help, and sought thy intercession was left unaided. . . ."

And her voice lost its inexorable accent ; no longer did she seem to denounce or condemn ; all the sweetness of a woman's voice, the tenderness of an invocation, seemed at each word to come back to her.

"Underneath," said Romaine in a fast fading voice, "yes, underneath, under my chemises . . . look . . . it is there . . . my prayer-book . . . there, hidden away . . . do look . . . it is underneath. . . . No ! no . . . no book . . . leave it . . . no ! no ! no !"

"*Our Lady of Sorrows ! have mercy upon us !*" said the Sister, and the emotion of her heart moved by compassion made her voice tremble and quiver. At moments even her memory failed and she hesitated for words.

"No . . . no . . ." again repeated Romaine in a dreamy tone. And what she was about to utter died away on her lips under the peaceful breath of the Sister's voice beginning again the *Novena*, the *Pater*, *Ave*, *Credo*, and *Confiteor*, with so sweet a tenderness, such a feeling of softness, such an accent of caressing pity that it sounded like a guardian angel lulling an agony to sleep.

Suddenly a horrible scream, "Help, Ma-

dame the Sister ! ” made the Sister run to Romaine’s bedside. She knelt down and remained there in prayer till she felt in her hands clasped by the dying woman the hands of the dead grow cold.





XXXVIII.

AFTER he had so hurriedly fled on the previous day, Barnier had not reappeared in the hospital. It was only the following morning that he came back, with his trousers muddy and stained with red-colored earth up to the knees. He had wandered all that night no one knew whither.

He went hastily up the stairs leading to the Sainte-Thérèse ward, and almost unconsciously walked straight into the middle of the room. The curtains round Romaine's bed

were drawn close, the placard had disappeared. Instinctively he put out his hand for support, and feeling the end of the big table, sat down on it with one leg hanging. Behind him he heard a sound of approaching steps, the measured tread of men bearing something. A terrified whisper ran from bed to bed, "*La boîte à chocolat! la boîte à chocolat!*" and a couple of male attendants carrying a covered stretcher brushed past him.

The two men placed the stretcher at the foot of the bed. They took off and put down on the ground by the side of it the convex top covered with brown American cloth. The bed-curtains slipped over the iron bars. On the bed lay stretched a long figure wrapped in a large white sheet fastened by a big knot at the top and bottom. One man took hold of the knot at the head of the bed, the other of the knot at the bottom; they pulled it toward the stretcher; the thing in the sheet, uplifted by both ends, sank toward the middle with a horrible, sickening bend.

The cover fell to with a dull sound, and the two men, breathing heavily as after an effort, went off with a kind of satisfied wheeze, and the sound of their steps, swaying regularly under the heavy burden, slowly grew

less and less till it died away in the distance.

Barnier remained motionless. He continued gazing at the same place, with eyes that seemed to see nothing. The curtains had been thrown up on each side of the tester, and the daylight could be seen through the empty bed. The blanket tossed across the iron bar at the foot of the bed hung down in straight lines to the floor. The pillow and sheets lay in a heap on the ground, and the sun, striking on the faded and washed-out mattress which remained on the spring bed, showed the hollow imprint left by a body.



XXXIX.

GREAT animation reigned in the president's room that evening, for the house-students were giving a dinner to the out-students. There was loud discussion while the coffee was drunk, and as the smoke rose from the first few pipes that were lighted, voices were raised to shouting pitch. At the moment when the brandy, circulating from hand to hand to be poured into the coffee, was passed over Barnier's head, Barnier, who usually

never touched it, seized the bottle and half-filled his empty cup.

"The Sisters? the Sisters? Well, all I can say," cried at this moment a small, shrill voice at the end of the table, "is that I knew a woman who went to the hospital for her confinement, and they neglected her shamefully; did not even keep her clean! All because she was not a married woman! and that's their charity. And then you have only to notice the difference they make in a ward between patients who confess and those who do not. It is all very fine, I don't deny it, but do not make out the Sisters better than they are. Why, good heavens! there are plenty of ward-maids and men nurses who are as good or better than they, and no one says a word about them."

"Oh! oh!" exclaimed several voices.

"Come, out with it; make no bones about it. The Sister of Charity is a humbug; I prefer that," said Barnier, and laying his pipe on his saucer he went on:

"You rile me. It is too stupid to run down those women, and to run them down here. Don't we know them just as well as you? Have you ever seen any here who have, as you say, neglected a woman be-

cause she had not her marriage-lines? Ah! this is the great grudge you have against them: they cram the Almighty down the patients' throats. To begin with, they do not do so very much cramming, after all; we know that. And if they did, what then? Suppose they do try to bring a glimpse of Paradise into a hospital ward? What would you bring? Comparative philosophy? Well, I have read Voltaire as well as you. I am no bigot, but it seems to me idiotic to push one's own opinions forward in affairs of this kind. What, d—n it! here are women giving up everything in the world, living night and day in a hospital, working like drudges, growing old amid everything that is abominable! women who spend their lives in consoling the suffering, closing the eyes of the dying, and without having to sustain them all that we have—life outside these walls, zeal for science, ambition for fame or fortune, a career before us. On my honor, if you don't call it grand, I don't know what you would have. But take who you like, the first comer out of the street, and set him down in a hospital ward to watch the Sisters doing what they all do, dress the most loathsome and disgusting sores . . . he would bare his head,

because at the sight of such devotion as that, my dear fellow, you may wish to play the cynic ; but the heart pays homage—when there is one."

"The deuce ! you take it up warmly, Barnier !" returned the shrill voice. "After all, my dear fellow, it is easy to understand why you are so excited. It is a personal question for you. You have your own reasons for defending the Sisters."

"Reasons ? what reasons ?" asked Barnier, emptying the brandy in his cup at one gulp.

"Don't play the innocent. You know them as well as I do. We are among comrades here ; there need be no mystery."

"When you have quite finished," said Barnier, resting his chin on his hand.

"Come, now ! On your honor, haven't you been weaving a gentle romance for the last twelve months with the Sister of your ward—Sister Philomène by name ?"

Barnier shrugged his shoulders. "I always did think you an ass, Pluvinel, but not such an ass as that !"

"After all, you may not be singed ; I know nothing about that ; but as to the Sister——"

"Shut up !"

"As for the Sister, she is caught. You

have turned the poor girl's head. Women like that have so little to occupy their imagination."

"Pluvinel," said Barnier, who lifted to his lips his now empty cup, "you are drunk."

"Why? Because I have seen what every one has seen—the Sister fluttering round you like a moth round a candle, and gazing at you with such eyes; in short, all the tricks of women when they are in such a plight? It is not worth while making such a pretence about it; I am only telling you things that are now perfectly notorious. You are the only person who does not talk about it. It makes the very ward-maids gossip."

"You say the Sister loves me?"

The blood and the brandy began to mount to Barnier's head, and amid his drunkenness a sudden gleam of light seemed to fall upon his memory. All kinds of unnoticed trifles, mere nothings that had not caught his attention during Romaine's illness, became clear and appeared to him as past events revealing themselves tardily in their true light.

"Well, do you see it now?"

"No," replied Barnier, taking the bottle again from the table and pouring more brandy into his cup.

“ Ah ! you don't see it. Undoubtedly you are the soul of discretion. My compliments, my dear fellow.”

“ Pluvinel ! ” cried Barnier, “ you are a bad man ! ” And changing his tone he began to laugh, looking at Pluvinel over the rim of his cup, which he emptied by little sips.

“ Gentlemen— ” began a voice.

“ Be quiet, over there ! Here is Pichenat giving a caricature of a chemical lesson from the celebrated *organopathe* by the bedside of a patient.”

“ Gentlemen,” shouted Pichenat, seated by the empty bed at the end of the room, in the attitude of the eminent doctor by the patient's bedside, “ this is a question that I address to all ; to *animists*, *solidists*, *vitalists*, *organicists*, *iatro-chemists*, *iatro-mathematicians*, to all the *iatros* ! Monsieur Bélard, examine the patient. He complains of a pain in the frontal bone, or rather the temporal bone. Well, Monsieur Bélard, have you sounded ? But how have you sounded ? Come, sound again. Be seated, gentlemen ; bring benches. And that is the way you sound, sir. But you skip ! you have skipped over more than an inch. The diseased spleen is enlarged nearly half an inch on

each side. From thence proceeds an unknown radiation half an inch on each side. Gentlemen, I tell you frankly I am indispensable to you ; I know it and you see it. If I were to die to-morrow, sounding without me, would be the world without the *psychatôme*. We must create words, gentlemen, create words ; they resemble ideas. Ah ! how is this ? And the patient who was in this bed last time—the poor man we had the grief to lose ? No one told me. . . . It is incredible ! . . . Such an extraordinary case ! So unfortunate ! No notification of the necropsy was given me ! It is an unheard-of want of respect to an *organopathe* like myself !’

The end of the parody was lost in the noise that all were making. The healths drank in every group, the brandy that circulated freely flew to all heads. At the table, where lay a pack of cards, play began for fabulous sums existing only in imagination. A student made drunk for the amusement of the others began to be, as they said, a complete success. Two house-students solemnly conversed together in a corner in low tones, and so effusively that at every moment they might be seen taking off their spectacles

to rub the glasses on their knees against the cloth of their trousers. Another was singing to himself the song traditional to all students of Bicêtre :

*Dans ce Bicêtre, où je m'embête,
Loin des plaisirs que je regrette,
Pauvre reclus, j'ai souvent médité
Sur la vieillesse et la caducité.**

Barnier, sunk in his chair, leaned his elbows on the table. His eyes throbbed, the muscles round his mouth had the nervous twitchings of drunkenness, and he chewed rather than smoked a cigar-stump, while he drank again from the cup into which he had poured more brandy.

"How you drink to-night. What is the matter with you?" said Malivoire.

"I! nothing. I am thirsty, that's all," replied Barnier shortly : and his glance falling upon the cards, he began, without opening his lips, to watch the cards flying hither and thither, and the players who contrived all to win at the same time. At the end of half an hour

* In this Bicêtre, where I am so bored,
Far from the pleasures whose loss I deplored,
A poor hermit am I, with no subject for thought
Save how to grow old and decrepit you ought.

he found himself at Pluvinel's side, and suddenly, as if just awoke, he said :

" I say, Pluvinel, you know what you said to me—you are sure, Pluvinel? Then it is—it is really true that the Sister has a fancy for me ? "

Pluvinel's only reply was a shrug of the shoulders. Then Barnier, with his arm round his neck, drew Pluvinel nearer, and bending toward him, said in broken sentences :

" You see . . . I should like to ask you . . . because you have evidently thought about the matter . . . you are older than we are, you know more of life, one can see that in your face . . . Well, I want you to tell me . . . if it has happened to you—you know, when ideas of this sort get into the brain, they won't let one rest—to think of a nun. A body that is sacred, a dress that bears a blessing . . . something, I don't know what, that inspires awe like the robe of the priest, and yet that attracts like the dress of a woman . . . I have seen pictures in books of nuns like that, with a man kneeling in front of them . . . I forgot in what stupid book. . . . You are like me, Pluvinel, eh? There is a sacrilege in a love affair of that

kind that is a temptation in itself. The veil . . . everything. Real forbidden fruit!" And Barnier's eyes gleamed.

"Well, and what then?" said Pluvinel.

"What then? Why, it is the hour for her round, and I'll just see—" and Barnier rose.

"Come, Barnier, stay here. You are drunk. Stay here—you will do something foolish."

But Barnier, having staggered valiantly to his feet, was already across the threshold. He crossed the court-yard, ascended the stairs, and as he went into the first ward, saw Sister Philomène enter the dispensary alone. He followed her; the little room, hot and close as a stove, sent a wave of fire mounting to his temples. The Sister, with her back to him, was warming up a cold tisane. He seized her by her two arms, and drew her close to his lips. But the Sister, with a supreme effort, wrenched her wrists away from the grasp that would detain her, and struck Barnier on the face. For a second he had a wild wish to return the blow, then he was frightened at himself. . . . He crossed the ward, went down-stairs, and fell rather than seated himself at the foot of the steps, on the

wall surrounding the patients' airing-yard, and there, taking a handful of the snow on which he was seated, he passed it over his face. He was perfectly sober when he returned to the president's room.

“Well?” said Pluvinel.

“Well! the first man who ventures to speak of Sister Philomène otherwise than he would of his own dead mother . . . I'll punch his head for him.”



XL.

THE next morning Barnier awoke with a feeling of disgust at himself. He was vaguely anxious, persecuted by the undefined feeling of dread that a base action leaves behind it. As the evening closed in he was astonished at not having been summoned before the committee. The following day he still expected to be sent for, but a whole week elapsed—the Sister had made no complaint.

At times a guilty blush would pass across his cheek. Nothing in his own eyes could excuse his conduct. He did not love the Sister—he had never even thought of loving her. No doubt he found a certain pleasure in conversing with her. He enjoyed the short moments he spent in her little room with her, in the soft, luminous atmosphere which seemed filled with the sanctity of her presence. He had become accustomed to the Sister's voice, to her glance, to her person, her gestures, her intimacy, her angelic familiarity. But as he listened to her or watched her, not one of his thoughts had ever wandered further than the white gown which seemed to wrap her up in innocence and disguise the woman's heart under the devotion of the nun. In the most confidential moments she had never been anything to him but a friend, and he did not suppose he had been anything more to her than a comrade. If he had made such an attempt, it had been in the madness of despair, under the fevered excitement of drink, as a man throws himself into any folly, hopelessly, desperately, without even the wish to succeed, merely to be rid, at any cost, of a poignant and haunting thought.

Then, little by little, he thought less of the

Sister ; his mind returned to Romaine and his thoughts were only of her. He remembered her first desertion of him, and how, in his determination to forget and drown all recollection of her, he had plunged wildly into every kind of dissipation, scattering to the winds the shreds of his lacerated heart. On seeing her again at the hospital, he fancied he had met a mistress he had been expecting, and who, returning from a journey, had merely neglected to write. Her forsaken condition, the lovers she had had, all that had taken place since their last kiss—his love, on finding her, had forgotten all, and he had taken her back to his heart. And now once more she had left him, and this time it was an eternal farewell, for she was dead ! And nothing remained to him but the recollection of her eyes, of her mouth, nothing save what the living senses can retain of a form that has vanished forever ! He longed to believe in something beyond death, in some future meeting beyond the tomb, in some other existence. . . .

And he absorbed himself in this idea of death, attracted toward it, dwelling on it, losing himself in the contemplation of it as one's vision is lost in empty space. Every-

thing within him and around him seemed to mourn for this woman. He felt himself seized and possessed of all kinds of gloomy, funereal, lugubrious ideas, which suffocated him but which he felt powerless to cast off. And he was so weak and helpless against these memories, which he incessantly evoked and which ruthlessly haunted him, that he took to drinking in order to place a barrier of drunkenness between himself and the dead.



XII.

It was to absinthe that Barnier daily had recourse to drown his thoughts. He inevitably chose this liquor which, extracted from wormwood, from the root of angelica, from the *calamus aromaticus*, and the seeds of *badiane*, lends an illusion similar to that which Asia and Africa derive from hemp, a magic excitement, mingling with the brutish drunkenness of the West the ideal raptures of oriental intoxication. Barnier was fascinated by this almost instantaneous intoxication, which seemed to rush and flow through his whole frame to his brain. He was charmed by the

immaterial, light, airy intoxication, which so gently bore him away in the arms of madness and oblivion.

He poured the absinthe into the bottom of the glass, and the bitter aroma of intoxicating herbs arose. From on high he would let fall into it, drop by drop, the water that made it opaque, and stirred up the little clouds of white, opal, mother-of-pearl color. Then he would stop, again take up the bottle, again fill the glass, and drink the green liquor like a liquid hashish. He drank and seemed to awake from a horrible nightmare. All his painful thoughts faded away and disappeared, as though they had evaporated. The dead woman was now transfigured into a shadowy image and memory enveloped him with a rose-tinted shroud. He drank and revelled in the fevered hurrying of his blood, in the electricity that seemed to flash through him and fill him with internal vibrations, with uncertain ideas that gayly traversed his brain, with the fresh activity that sped through all his moral and intellectual faculties. For the intoxication that took possession of him was not the intoxication of wine, it was no animal sensuality nor stupefying sensation ; it was more a sensibility which, without affecting him in

body or externally, acted on the mysterious mental organs that make feeling become sensation. His mind, his imagination was volatilized, so to speak, and all that still reached his senses was poetized and transposed as in a dream. In this impulse and vague awakening to a new existence his soul laughed with an indescribable impression of comfort at a luminous something, just as a child laughs at flowers round its cradle. His memory caught hold of some scrap of phrase and was lulled by it. Little by little his ideas lost shape, became more fluttering, more vague, softer and more distant ; and thus mere numbers would become harmonies. His head drooped in a lazy happiness ; and Barnier slept with his eyes open, in the torpor of a plant in a hot-house, with the satisfaction of a man lying under a ray of light on the border of dreamland.

The more Barnier lost himself in this unnatural existence, the more he sought its gratification, freedom, absence of thought, idle ecstasies, the more cruel was the awakening when he fell back on himself. Every-day life became for him an insupportable disenchantment. Ordinary sensations were insipid. The dulness and triviality of reality filled him

with boundless *ennui*. He suffered under the low, gray sky of human life all that a man shut up in a cellar, with a ray of sunlight passing under the door, would suffer. And with *ennui* memory returned.

Intoxication thus became his real life, the life by the side of which the other was but wretchedness, drudgery, a lie and a mystification, and he at last drew from absinthe even strength for his work. His intelligence appeared to him to grow and gain under its exciting influence ; he felt as though his brain, till then heavy and dimmed, were filled with a subtle gas. His comprehension had the vivacity and lucidity of second-sight. What he had formerly sought for in vain now came at once to his mind. Problems were solved, and new horizons opened before him, and he found himself possessed of a keenness and capacity of perception hitherto unknown.

It was not only his mind that appeared to gain energy in this constant fever ; his body, too, seemed to gain strength. His hand, like the hand of certain engravers steadied by drink, had never been more sure, more delicate, more cleverly daring in the small operations and the dressings belonging to his service.



XLII.

HABIT, however, soon deadened Barnier's drunken felicity. What he drank no longer lifted him as rapidly out of grief and worry. He no longer felt himself transported into a world of sensations that renewed his whole being. He now only experienced the passing excitement that the fumes of drunkenness sent rushing up to his brain, to disappear as rapidly and leave him stranded, just as the waves abandon a body which has been cast ashore.

He was obliged to increase the dose of poison. Each day he drank a little more, doubling, trebling the dose, until he reached a point at which it would seem that absinthe would strike a man dead—drinking it as pure

alcohol. Daily he sunk deeper and deeper into this abyss of artificial beatitude in which he enjoyed the arrest of his senses and the numbness of his soul. What he demanded of this intemperance and what it gave him was no longer the excitement that had at first charmed him, but only the blissful listlessness that had succeeded and blunted his first experiences. And this enervating torpor that seemed to deprive him of all power of will, this ecstasy peopled with phantoms of ideas and swarming with images, this swaying sensation that seemed to rock his thoughts in empty space, as in a hammock—all these returned with an ever-renewed sweetness and more voluptuous bewilderment. Drinking in this manner, he could not eat. Hunger no longer reminded him of the hours of meals. His stomach seemed to reject all that was not the fiery liquid that devoured it. His companions in the surgeons' room watched him as he lazily cut up his food, played with it, and left it on his plate. At first they had tried teasing him about it, but Barnier had answered them in so savage a way, in such brutal language, that he was speedily left alone and was hardly spoken to at table. He did not get thin, however; on the contrary, he grew

rather fat, but it was the unhealthy fat caused by excess. Malivoire noticed that Barnier was getting into the habit of holding his thumb closed and bent under his fingers ; and he was alarmed at the appearance of this sign of death—which he had so often observed in the dying—in a man whose symptoms showed so advanced a stage of drunkenness.





XLIII.

"Do you want to kill yourself?" said Malivoire, as Barnier mixed his sixth glass of absinthe.

"Kill myself? kill myself!" and Barnier contemptuously shrugged his shoulders by way of answer.

Malivoire, Barnier's great friend, was a young fellow who hid a cold and indifferent heart under a southern vivacity of gesticula-

tion and an animated manner of speech. Nothing amused or diverted him, nothing captivated, shocked, or bored him. All passion, pleasure, or ambition left him indifferent; his was a curious nature, neither hot nor cold, that reminded one of the Chinese dish of fried ice. He was always ready for anything—to go to a ball if others wished; to go to bed, if this were preferred; ready for a carousal if others were willing, ready to work, if they were so disposed, ready to fight if such were the order of the day; as indifferent to the one as the other, never taking the trouble to exert his will one way or another.

He was, however, neither a fool nor an unintelligent man; indeed, he was witty, of a mountebank style of wit, not wanting in humor or fun. But he was essentially and by vocation an impersonal being. Attracted to Barnier by the latter's strong personality, he had become fond of him, and followed him like his shadow. This friendship, the only sentiment Malivoire had which was not merely skin deep, his only devotion, had led to his comrades dubbing him with a nickname taken from hospital slang: they called him Barnier's *roupion bénévole*, after the probationers attached to a senior surgeon and

authorized by him to wear the white apron and assist the house-surgeon as dresser.

Barnier, on the contrary, with every appearance of coldness, with a thoughtful, concentrated and intimidating countenance—Barnier was one of those impassioned natures who pass unnoticed by superficial observers, and who are only betrayed by the warmth of their glance, the mobility of their lips. He was one of those nervous, bilious temperaments, in which intelligence and action combine, full of power of will, and in which a harmony of conception and execution form the character. His intelligence, which was purely original, borrowing nothing from others, was thoroughly independent. He possessed the moral courage and perhaps over-exalted consciousness of his own personality—that is, in revolt against all conventional ideas : ideas that are received and imposed by the world in which one lives, by early education, by all that tends to clothe thought with a uniform livery ; and such was the zeal of his intolerance for anything that to him appeared like a lie or hypocrisy that he inveighed against the scientific sentimentality of Malivoire, and was seriously angered by his mania—an affectation, indeed, of

the new school of medicine—of hiding the terrifying nature of diseases under melodious euphonisms.

Accustomed to give way to this expansive, strong, and imperious personality, mastered by the individuality of this comrade, whom he felt fitted to carry through any idea or determination he chose, Malivoire had little power to wrench from Barnier's hands the glass from which he drank brutalization. He tried, however ; he strove to stop him by threats and supplications. Barnier let him run on, shrugged his shoulders—and drank.



XI.V.

AT one moment, however, Barnier paused in his downward career.

Amid the profound discouragement of the life into which he had fallen, in the midst of the grief that had made him loathe the ordinary cravings of his heart, and a cowardly shrinking from duty, Barnier had retained all his pride of intellect ; ambition, surviving everything else, still throbbed within him, just as in a body the last throb of the heart is felt even when life has quitted all other

organs. He wanted to obtain the house-surgeon's gold medal, the highest honor, which is the desire, temptation, and dream of all house-surgeons. He failed at an examination, complaints were being made at the hospital about his negligence, and he understood that the medal, which till then even his comrades admitted he had a right to expect, would not be his. The vexation roused him. He looked into himself, and the examination revealed a state which startled him. He found his intelligence heavy and numbed ; his faculty for comprehension, at first stimulated by drink, had become slow, idle, almost lifeless, and required to be put in action, an effort that cost immense fatigue. His memory failed him ; to remember and retain anything for a day or two now required an intense and persistent effort of will. In his discussions with his companions, he felt astonished, humiliated, and alarmed—he, a precise and syllogistic mind—at his confusion, want of logic, and the clumsy vagueness of his arguments. He listened to himself as he talked ; his speech was no longer the enunciation of a clear thought ; a congestion of images, a flood of sensations assailed him, leaving him no time

to cast his words into phrases, in a grammatical form ; they gushed out in substantives no longer connected by verbs. His diffuse, scattered ideas no longer grouped themselves ; the thread of reasoning was broken in his brain. He still was capable of a witty repartee ; but the connecting link between what he said and what he had said no longer existed. He would hesitate, stop in the middle of a conversation or a narrative, like a pianoforte player who finds on the keyboard a missing note. In this recognition and self-avowal he also found himself embittered, his nerves impatient, and his temper aggressive and quarrelsome. He recognized that he was worried and tormented by irresistible impulses to contradict and say unkind things, to surly irritability and unfair judgments, which, awakened in him by the abuse of absinthe, little by little drove away all his companions. At the bottom of this degradation and downfall his personality itself appeared to him to have become the prey of a base and vile passion ; he felt ashamed at finding himself devoid of energy and impulse, without the habitual courage that prompted his actions. At each moment and on every subject he was seized with irresolution, a

moral faltering that deadened even his power of indignation, and in the place of his former generous though touchy individuality, his bold personality, his sincere, free, and valiant mind, he found only passive indifference.

Physically, the ravages were still more startling ; and Barnier could detect in himself the symptoms he had read of—the diminution of muscular tone, weakness in the legs, and sometimes in the morning a slight vermicular trembling of the tongue. . . .

Then, seized with a horrible dread, experienced by young medical students who, ever pondering over the diseases they are studying, seek in themselves for the complaint that horrifies them, Barnier dwelt terror-struck on his illness ; and his first thoughts rushing off to the most terrifying examples science had offered him, he foresaw the abominable expiation demanded by alcoholism, in which the blood is already corrupted in the arteries three months before death ensues. He be-thought him with horror of those dreadful dead, who have left to the grave but half its work to do.



XLV.

THEN a conflict arose in Barnier between habit and will. He struggled with his passion and strove to wrench himself from it. He passed through the anguish and anxiety, the supreme efforts, the painful victories, the desperate cowardices that at last destroy all energy and weaken a man by constant shocks, so that he is left helpless and hesitating to face all the temptations of his discomfort, the fatal inspirations of a worn-out judgment, the longing for final rest. . . . The anguish and uncertainty of the struggle exasperated his irritability. He grew morose and gloomy.

He gave utterance to the bitterness he felt in words the irony of which concealed his despair. On the days he would not give way and was able to resist drink his blighted life, his ruined career, his shattered health, his weakened intellect, a future which he could not calmly contemplate, all rose up before him and crushed him. On those days the thought of Romaine haunted him, and it seemed as if her shadow were near him, like a woman waiting on the threshold of an open door.

He tried to wear out by physical fatigue these temptations and visions ; he walked for hours about Paris, through quarters of the town that he did not even see as he passed through them, elbowed by crowds that he did not feel, going on and on straight before him till he found no pavement under his feet ; and when he returned and sat down to dinner in the residents' room, he bore on his face the traces of that utter lassitude which in one day ages a man more than a year.



XLVI.

ONE day that Malivoire was replacing Barnier in his work he was struck by the pallor and emaciated appearance of Sister Philomène, and he could not help saying to her how altered she was and had been for some time past.

"Yes, it is true," replied the Sister, "but everybody changes. I am not so much altered as Monsieur Barnier, however. I am told he is killing himself with drink. Has he no friends to warn him?"



XLVII.

THE Sister was indeed very much altered. In her wasted countenance her large eyes had the sickly smile of an invalid. The happy state of her mind was no longer to be seen in her face. Her smile had lost its playfulness, and when she made an effort to recover herself, when, by the bedside of a patient, she strove and succeeded in being cheerful, after

a very few minutes she suddenly felt her assumed mirth forsake her. She had no longer the spirit necessary to dispense those invigorating cordials of charity, hope, and confidence in God which she formerly offered her patients so freely and in such abundance. She no longer felt the winged strength that formerly bore her from bed to bed.

Never, however, had she busied herself more with her patients; never had she so worked, walked, wearied her body by going and coming and her zeal by excessive devotion. Her days, her nights, her whole life were but one continual sacrifice, and it might have been thought she wished to push to the extreme limits of her courage the accomplishment of her duties, so eagerly did she seek out the hardest, the most repulsive and humiliating tasks, so jealous was she to suffer all the trials of the hospital.

When, in the night that had preceded Romaine's entry into the hospital, Sister Philomène had awoke from the dream of her senses—from the half-vanished dream which still made her whole body quiver—she had thrown herself on her knees, half-dressed, in her cell, and until the four-o'clock bell had remained in prayer on the cold tiles, im-

mersed in a sentiment of fear and painful anxiety ; deeply disturbed without, however, understanding why, without a thought of love crossing her candid and ingenuous heart.

She had spent the whole day in self-examination and interrogation, face to face with her conscience. By degrees, as she searched her thoughts, she had been struck by the resemblance of what she had believed, of what she still believed to be an allowable affection, a sweet friendship—with love, or, at least, with the idea that the little she had read in books made her conceive was love. Looking back, she recalled to memory the course of the preceding months, from the first time Barnier had sat down beside her in her closet, when he occupied the chair now before her. She remembered the pleasure she took in their little chats, in which she lost sight of self and the flight of time. She admitted the secret joy, the deep and intimate joy she felt at being praised by the house-surgeon, the excitement, emulation, and fervor that his commendation had lent to her charity and devotedness. Searching deeply and scrutinizing the agreeable and disagreeable sensations she had experienced on different occasions from Barnier's words,

which, without doubt, ought to have had no effect upon her, she paused for a moment, staggered, as at some discovery by all the feelings these words had created and raised in her of resolves, bitterness, joys, and desires ; terrified at the impression they had made on her, and at the length of time they had remained silent in her mind and heart. In all the past, which her memory conjured up with vivid freshness, she recalled her grief when she thought herself about to leave the ward, her anxiety while uncertain as to her destination, her joy and relief when it had been decided to maintain her in her place ; and she asked herself if it was indeed only that ward and those patients that she had been so sorry to quit and so happy to remain with. At the same time, she remembered her joy on learning that Barnier was to be allowed to pass the third year of his student-ship in the same hospital, and the void, the singular void she had felt in her existence during the surgeon's month's holiday. And following up her train of thought, she recalled thousands of details, petty circumstances, which she had not heeded at the time. She reproached herself with the indulgence and toleration with which she had allowed the

young surgeon to speak on all subjects ; the timidity she had felt in contradicting him ; the passive, almost complacent, attention she had lent to his attacks on religion ; the laughter and jokes she had opposed to his impious remarks, which from any other would have roused her indignation. And at all these indications, all these symptoms of an attachment that was, no doubt, culpable, opening her eyes in a confused way, and yet still a prey to uncertainty, she had resolved to speak to her confessor on the subject and ask to change wards.

Romaine's arrival at the hospital, the change the Sister had felt in herself, the outburst and sudden revelation of her love by the tortures of jealousy, the effort, the super-human effort she had required during the evening prayer to stifle the hatred of the woman under the pity of the Christian, and crave God's mercy for the dying creature beloved by Barnier ; then the scene in which, flying from Barnier's kiss, she had felt herself so weak at heart that she had summoned up violence to her help—all this flashing, tearing, rending, and enlightening her conscience, had changed her resolutions. Ashamed and startled at herself, hating her

weakness and this attachment, in which she saw but sin, she had chosen her own penance. She had not spoken ; she had confided nothing to her confessor ; she had not asked to change wards ; she had imposed on herself the duty of remaining, repenting, and suffering and expiating there where she had loved, there where she still loved. She had determined to remain in the daily temptation of that man's presence, in order to have more grief to vanquish, and at every moment mercilessly to punish her senses and her heart by the incessant torture of remorse and the craving of her love. She would have wished this love to have lain on her heart like a hair-shirt, rubbing ceaselessly on her wound.

And the crucifixion of her heart did not suffice for her ; she also martyred her flesh by tortures hidden under her robe, by all kinds of macerations that she drew from stories of martyrs. And each day, growing paler and thinner, she saw, not without a secret joy, her health giving way : it was the trappings of her body she offered up as a sacrifice to God.



XLVIII.

THE days on which Barnier still put in an appearance at the Sainte-Thérèse ward the Sister did not shun him, she merely kept him at a distance by an icy manner. She put him aside like a stranger, avoided the least thing that might draw them together, and evaded every occasion of speech or interchange of words that was not absolutely exacted by her duties. For some days Barnier had been

hovering round about her, seeking an opportunity of meeting her ; but the Sister had always managed to avoid him by never being alone, placing some under-nurse or patient as a third person between them. At last, one day, at the end of the surgeon's round, Barnier, watching a moment when she was alone, managed to say to her :

“ Sister Philomène, I humbly ask your forgiveness, and beg you to let me hear from your own lips that you have forgiven me.”

The Sister listened to his voice, surprised at the emotion it betrayed. She turned to Barnier with a gentle and sad look, her lips parted to speak ; but her heart was too full, and she passed silently before the surgeon, went into her closet, and closed the door after her.



XLIX.

THAT day, at about four o'clock, Barnier and Malivoire were leaving the establishment at Clamart where he had been dissecting a body. He went out by the little green door and down three steps.

"We are going to walk home, are we not?" asked Malivoire, puffing at his pipe.

"Just as you please."

They started off along the pavement by the side of the little, low garden wall, overtopped by the roof of the amphitheatre and its four glass lanterns. The smell of a tan-yard filled the air. To the left the smoke of a factory chimney sent up white puffs into the gray sky. As they turned down the Rue du Fer-à-Moulin :

"I say, Barnier," remarked Malivoire, "do you know that to-day is the 20th of December, and that I would give something to be in your place?"

"Why?"

"Why? Because in ten days you will have ended your four years' house-studentship. And you will be able to bid adieu to the hospital—wretched place," said Malivoire as he pointed to the black walls of the Hospital de la Pitié they were just passing. "You will begin practice on your own account, you will be started in life, and with a little luck. . . . By the way, have you hired any rooms?"

"No."

"What! you have not yet taken any? How

absurd ! Well, I see I must do the necessary for you. I will look out for some in a district—a commercial and well-to-do district—something near the Bourse ; that is central, and we will settle you down comfortably. Come, let us see, what will you require ? A small ante-room, a little drawing-room for the patients to wait in, and a study, not very high up, on account of the invalids. The drawing-room must have a light, cheerful paper, a sofa, and arm-chairs. Hang it ! I saw just the furniture you will want sold last week at an auction. Well, the furniture must have covers of white and pink striped satinette. You must hang up a few lithographs by Hamon. On the table, a Turkish table cover and some serious books—you can easily buy a few old volumes. You understand, the client who comes to consult is more or less depressed ; your reception-room must have a reassuring aspect. The consulting-room—oh ! there everything must be austere. I advise carved oak furniture. On the mantle-piece, a set of Colas' bronze ornaments ; that is indispensable, my dear fellow, and the traditional engravings : '*Hippocrates refusing the presents of Artaxerxes*,' and the other that goes with it ; they can't hurt. I bet you would take

an apartment without two exits, poor innocent, if I were not there to help you."

From the Rue Geoffroy-Saint-Hilaire they had turned into the Rue Saint-Victor. The houses were closer together, low and filthy, with small windows stuck like holes in the dirty plaster. Barnier and Malivoire passed in front of low pot-houses with grimy window-panes and black parlors, before green-grocers' shops where, under low doors, bloaters lay pell-mell with apples; before cook-shops that displayed a stale piece of roast veal between empty bottles. Next to a huckster's that filled up half the entry to an alley was a wine-shop with a grating painted red, behind which could be seen heaps of potatoes. Then came a kind of second-hand grocery store, with barrels of mouldy plums; then a small hosier's, filled with the thick knitted vests that the working class use in winter; a library of trumpery books, with a window on the ground floor crammed full of ha'penny ballads, and a hair-dresser's shop-front, in which the ashen wax heads had orange-red cheeks.

A little before they reached the Place Maubert stood a half-pulled-down house, with a large wall still erect, on which was visible

the framework of the former dwellings, with its lines of ceilings, floorings, landings, fire-places, and the black streaks of chimneys, the wall-papers of the rooms still greasy where heads had rested.

"If a house like that could say all it has seen of suffering," muttered Barnier, thinking aloud, as he vaguely gazed at those six stories of misery shown forth to the light of day.

"And your thesis, Barnier?" asked Malivoire. "It is not an easy subject you have chosen: *The Anastomosis of the Superior Cervical Ganglion.*"

"No, I am not going to do that. I have changed my mind."

"And you have decided on?"

"On *Death.*"

"Ah! really."

"Yes. I'll tell you my idea. I want to prove that natural death, which was the death of man in primitive days, and which is his proper death—natural death in fact no longer exists. In our modern existence every one dies by accident. Life is not used up, it breaks. It is a suicide more or less slow."

"You are still a materialist, I hope?"

"Of course! The soul is a great impediment in scientific questions." And Barnier

said this last phrase in a tone that puzzled Malivoire.

"Let us take a cab ; there's one," continued Barnier, making a sign to a passing driver.

"It is hardly worth while now. What is the matter with you ? You are trembling."

"I feel a kind of shiver."

"My dear fellow, I am sure it's your disgusting absinthe that gives you the feeling. It acts as a whip-up, just as gin does to the English. No, it is really too provoking of you ; you really ought not to go on drinking."

"Well, I promise I will leave off drinking, Malivoire. But don't speak to me any more about it ; it worries me." And Barnier cowered back in a corner of the cab.

When they reached the hospital, Barnier went up to bed.



L.

THE next morning the whole hospital knew that Barnier, having scratched his hand on the previous day while dissecting a body in a state of purulent infection, was dying in terrible agonies.

When at four o'clock Malivoire, quitting for a few moments the bedside of his friend, came to replace him in the service, the Sister

went up to him. She followed from bed to bed, dogging his steps, without, however, accosting him, without speaking, watching him intently, with her eyes fixed on his. As he was leaving the ward :

“ Well ? ” she asked, in the brief tone with which women stop the doctor on his last visit at the threshold of the room.

“ No hope,” said Malivoire, with a gesture of despair, “ there is nothing to be done. It began at his right ankle, went up the leg and thigh, and has attacked all the articulations. Such agonies, poor fellow ; it will be a mercy when it’s over.”

“ Will he be dead before night ? ” asked the Sister calmly.

“ Oh, no ! He will live through the night. It is the same case as that of Raguideau three years ago ; and Raguideau lasted forty-eight hours.”



LI.

THAT evening, at ten o'clock, Sister Philomène might be seen entering the church of Notre-Dame-des-Victoires.

The lamps were being lowered, the lighted tapers were being put out one by one with a long-handled extinguisher. The priest had just left the vestry.

The Sister inquired where he lived, and was told that his house was a couple of steps from the church in the Rue de la Banque.

The priest was just going into the house when she entered behind, pushing open the door he was closing.

"Come in, Sister," he said, unfurling his wet umbrella and placing it on the tiled floor in the ante-room. And he turned toward her. She was on her knees. "What are you doing, Sister?" he said, astonished at her attitude. "Get up, my child. This is not a fit place. Come, get up."

"You will save him, will you not?" and Philomène caught hold of the priest's hands as he stretched them out to help her to rise. "Why do you object to my remaining on my knees?"

"Come, come, my child, do not be so excited. It is God alone, remember, who can save. I can but pray."

"Ah! you can only pray," she said, in a disappointed tone. "Yes, that is true."

And her eyes sank to the ground. After a moment's pause the priest went on:

"Come, Sister, sit down there. You are calmer now, are you not? Tell me, what is it you want?"

“He is dying,” said Philomène, rising as she spoke. “He will probably not live through the night,” and she began to cry. “It is for a young man of twenty-seven years of age ; he has never performed any of his religious duties, never been near a church, never prayed to God since his first Communion. He will refuse to listen to anything. He no longer knows a prayer even. He will listen neither to priest nor any one. And, I tell you, it is all over with him, he is dying. Then I remembered your Confraternity of Notre-Dame-des-Victoires, since it is devoted to those who do not believe. Come, you must save him ! ”

“My daughter. . . .”

“. . . And perhaps he is dying at this very moment. Oh ! promise me you will do all at once, all that is in the Confraternity book ; the prayers, everything, in short. You will have him prayed for at once, won't you ? ”

“But, my poor child, it is Friday to-day, and the Confraternity only meets on Thursday.”

“Thursday only ; why ? It will be too late Thursday. He will never live till Thursday. Come, you must save him ; you have saved many another.”

Sister Philomène looked at the priest with wide-opened eyes, in which, through her tears, rose a glance of revolt, impatience, and command. For one instant in that room there was no longer a Sister standing before a priest, but a woman face to face with an old man.

The priest resumed :

“ All I can do at present for that young man, my dear daughter, is to apply to his benefit all the prayers and good works that are being carried on by the Confraternity, and I will offer them up to the Blessed and Immaculate Heart of Mary to obtain his conversion. I will pray for him to-morrow at Mass, and again on Saturday and Sunday.”

“ Oh ! I am so thankful,” said Philomène, who felt tears rise gently to her eyes as the priest spoke to her. “ Now I am full of hope ; he will be converted, he will have pity on himself. Give me your blessing for him.”

“ But, Sister, I only bless from the altar, in the pulpit, or in the confessional. There only am I the minister of God. Here, my Sister, here I am but a weak man, a miserable sinner.”

“ That does not signify ; you are always

God's minister, and you cannot, you would not, refuse me ; he is at the point of death."

She fell on her knees as she spoke. The priest blessed her, and added :

"It is nearly eleven o'clock, Sister ; you have nearly three miles to get home, all Paris to cross at this late hour."

"Oh ! I am not afraid," replied Philomène, with a smile ; "God knows why I am in the street. Moreover, I will tell my beads on the way. The Blessed Virgin will be with me."



LII.

THE same evening, Barnier, rousing himself from a silence that had lasted the whole day, said to Malivoire : " You will write to my mother. You will tell her that this often happens in our profession."

" But you are not yet as bad as all that, my dear fellow," replied Malivoire, bending over the bed. " I am sure I shall save you."

" No, I chose my man too well for that. How well I took you in, my poor Malivoire ! " and he smiled almost. " You understand, I could not kill myself. I did not wish to be the death of my old mother. But an acci-

dent—that settles everything. You will take all my books, do you hear, and my case of instruments also. I wish you to have all. You wonder why I have killed myself, don't you? Come nearer. It is on account of that woman. I never loved but her in all my life. They did not give her enough chloroform; I told them so. Ah! if you had heard her scream when she awoke—before it was over! That scream still reëchoes in my ears! However,” he continued, after a nervous spasm, “if I had to begin again, I would choose some other way of dying, some way in which I should not suffer so much. Then, you know, she died, and I fancied I had killed her. She is ever before me, . . . covered with blood. . . . And then I took to drinking. I drank because I love her still. . . . That's all!”

Barnier relapsed into silence. After a long pause, he again spoke and said to Malivoire :

“You will tell my mother to take care of the little lad.”

After another pause, the following words escaped him :

“The Sister would have said a prayer.”

Shortly after, he asked :

“What o'clock is it?”

“Eleven.”

“Time is not up yet, . . . I have still some hours to live. . . . I shall last till to-morrow.”

A little later he again inquired the time, and crossing his hands on his breast, in a faint voice he called Malivoire and tried to speak to him. But Malivoire could not catch the words he muttered.

Then the death-rattle began and lasted till morn.





LIII.

A CANDLE lighted up the room.

It burnt slowly, it lighted up the four white walls on which the coarse ochre paint of the door and of the two cupboards cut a sharp contrast. One of the open cupboards displayed books crowded and piled up on its shelves ; on the other was an earthen jug and basin. Over the chimney, painted to imitate black marble, a petrified *Gorgone* leaf hung in the middle of the empty panel. In one corner, where the paint was worn by scratching matches, was a little glass framed in gilt

paper, a souvenir of some excursion in the neighborhood of Paris. The curtainless window revealed a roof, and blank darkness beyond. It was the counterpart of a room of some inn in the suburb of a great city.

On the iron bedstead, with its dimity curtains, a sheet lay thrown over a motionless body, moulding the form as wet linen might do, indicating with the inflexibility of an immutable line the rigidity, from the tip of the toes to the sharp outline of the face, of what it covered.

Near a white wooden table Malivoire, seated in a large wicker arm-chair, watched and dozed, half slumbering and yet not quite asleep.

In the silence of the room nothing could be heard but the ticking of the dead man's watch.

From behind the door something seemed gently to move and advance, the key turned in the lock, and Sister Philomène stood beside the bed. Without looking at Malivoire, without seeing him, she knelt down and prayed in the attitude of a kneeling marble statue ; and the folds of her gown were as motionless as the sheet that covered the dead man.

At the end of a quarter of an hour she rose, walked away without once looking round, and disappeared.

The next day, awaking at the hollow sound of the coffin knocking against the narrow stairs, Malivoire vaguely recalled the night's apparition, and wondered if he had dreamed it ; and, going mechanically up to the table by the bedside, he sought for the lock of hair he had cut off for Barnier's mother—the lock of hair had vanished.



Books Comprised in this Series. Half Alligator, \$2.25; Paper, \$1.50.

TARTARIN OF TARASCON: Traveller, "Turk" and Lion-Hunter. By ALPHONSE DAUDET. With 115 illustrations from designs by Montégut, Myrbach, Picard and Rossi.

TARTARIN ON THE ALPS. By ALPHONSE DAUDET. With 150 illustrations from designs by Rossi, Aranda, Myrbach, Monténard and Beaumont.

LA BELLE NIVERNAISE: The Story of an Old Boat and Her Crew, and Other Stories. By ALPHONSE DAUDET. With 185 illustrations from designs by Montégut.

SAPPHO: A Picture of Parisian Manners. By ALPHONSE DAUDET. With 70 illustrations from designs by Rossi, Myrbach and other French artists.

RECOLLECTIONS OF A LITERARY MAN. By ALPHONSE DAUDET. Translated by Laura Ensor. With 89 illustrations from designs by Bieler, Montégut, Myrbach and Rossi.

THIRTY YEARS OF PARIS AND OF MY LITERARY LIFE. By ALPHONSE DAUDET. Translated by Laura Ensor. With 120 illustrations from designs by Bieler, Montégut, Myrbach, Picard and Rossi.

ARTISTS' WIVES. By ALPHONSE DAUDET. Translated by Laura Ensor. With 103 illustrations by Rossi, Bieler and others.

JACK. By ALPHONSE DAUDET. Translated by Laura Ensor. With 93 illustrations by Myrbach.

KINGS IN EXILE. By ALPHONSE DAUDET. Translated by Laura Ensor. With illustrations from designs by Bieler, Conconi and Myrbach.

PIERRE AND JEAN. By GUY DE MAUPASSANT. Translated by Hugh Craig. With a preface by the author. With illustrations from designs by Ernest Duez and Albert Lynch.

AFLOAT (Sur L'Eau). By GUY DE MAUPASSANT. Translated by Laura Ensor. With 59 illustrations from designs by Riou.

SISTER PHILOMÈNE. By EDMOND and JULES DE GONCOURT. Translated by Laura Ensor. With 88 illustrations from designs by Bieler.

DISILLUSION: The Story of Amedée's Youth (*Toute une Jeunesse*). By FRANÇOIS COPPÉE. Translated by E. P. Robins. With 74 illustrations from designs by Emile Bayard.



14 DAY USE
RETURN TO DESK FROM WHICH BORROWED

LOAN DEPT.

This book is due on the last date stamped below, or
on the date to which renewed.

Renewed books are subject to immediate recall.

26 Sep '56 PW	
JAN 24 1957	
	OCT 28 1982
25 Jun '60 RW	
	REC. CIR. DEC 1 '82
28 Aug '64 LB	
	REC CIR JUN 15 '83
REC'D LD	
AUG 14 '64 -4 PM	
JUN 1 1982	RECEIVED BY
RECEIVED	SEP 16 1982
OCT 30 '69 -5 PM	CIRCULATION DEPT.
LOAN DEPT.	

GENERAL LIBRARY - U.C. BERKELEY



B000819276

